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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the findings of a 2-year research project on creative writing and adult education in Cleveland, England, that focused on the ideas and feelings of tutors, students, and writers involved in creative writing workshops in the city. The report begins with overviews of creative writing activities in Cleveland (including mention of professional writers currently/formerly residing in the city). Presented next are comments from those interviewed regarding opportunities for developing writing inside and outside educational institutions, including government-funded community arts projects and voluntary networks. Available outlets for publication are identified. The aims/significance of research examining adult education and creative writing programs are discussed. Barriers to involvement in creative writing programs and the different uses made of creative writing in education are described, and the debate over whether creative writing is or should be education or art is considered. The next few sections address the following concerns identified by those interviewed: assessment, creative writing groups as sources of support and guidance for free-standing groups and vehicles for giving/receiving constructive feedback. Concluding the report are guidelines for giving and receiving good feedback, and a discussion of the roles of creative writers as tutors and tutors as writers. Contains 22 references. (MN)

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Written on the margins

Creative writing and adult education in Cleveland

Norah Hill in Percy Street

Rebecca O'Rourke

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Creative writing and adult education in Cleveland

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Introduction

> How much it takes to become a writer. Bent (far more common than we assume), circumstances, time, development of craft - but beyond that: how much conviction as to the importance of what one has to say, one's right to say it. ... Difficult for any male not born into a class that breeds such confidence. Almost impossible for a girl, a woman.
>
> (Tillie Olsen)

Arguments about whether writers are born or made have always been less interesting to me than those about the un-making of writers through the lack of entitlement and opportunity. During fifteen years' involvement with the writing workshop movement I have never doubted its fundamental impulse. But as I campaigned for changed priorities in arts policy, challenged the exclusion of creative writing from the teaching of English, belonged to and tutored workshops, served on the Executive of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers and wrote my own novels and short stories, I have always argued about, as well as for, the right to write. This report, the first from a two year research project initiated by the University of Leeds' Department of Adult Continuing Education, contains both kinds of argument. The research project arose because during the mid 80s the Department successfully developed a programme of creative writing courses as part of its community education work in Cleveland. Such popularity generated curiosity and its was felt important both to learn more about the courses and to investigate their relation to wider educational and arts issues.

Mark Robinson at North Ormesby Primary School's book week

A premium was put upon recording the ideas and feelings of those involved as tutors, students and writers which is reflected in the writing of this report. It begins with an outline of Cleveland's creative writing activity, identifying the special role played by adult education and community activism. I then discuss my working methods, stressing the dual remit of the research to explore issues of policy and practice. The following sections summarise the project's main aspects and findings, including factors influencing the provision and take up of creative writing activities and the relation of creative writing to education and the arts. I then discuss three areas of concern voiced by participants - differentiated provision, assessment and giving and receiving critical feedback. These formed the basis of participative, developmental projects and I report their findings as well as discussing another developmental aspect, support and training for tutors, before offering some general conclusions.

Writing in Cleveland

In the early 1980s I lived in Cleveland unaware that anyone else shared my interest in writing, yet within days of starting work on the project in 1992 I was spoilt for choice as the Writearound Festival set out its stall in Hartlepool, Whitby, Guisborough, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar, Skelton and Loftus. A few weeks later I swapped bus timetables for a different sort of map when Trevor Teasdel kindly compiled an impressive thirty page outline history of the writing movement in Cleveland.

I familiarised myself with the writing activities in Cleveland in various ways. I looked at publications, noting when, where and how they'd originated. I read reports from adult education institutions and arts organisations. But most importantly, I talked to people about their memories and impressions. I've included a fairly full account here because so few people have this overview.

There are distinct areas but they overlap. First are the writers who live, or have lived here - published or not. Second, activities which support writers in Cleveland, both educational and voluntary. Education spans the full spectrum from schools through adult basic education to the various forms of further, adult and higher education. The achievement of voluntary writing activity distinguishes Cleveland nationally. A number of committed individuals have developed writing networks: writing groups, small presses or one-off publications, information exchanges and the promotion of writing. Thirdly come the outlets for writing - small magazines and presses, local radio, newspapers and television. Finally, there is the impact of Northern Arts and Cleveland's local arts organisation, Cleveland Arts, and local authority leisure services provision, including the recent role of City Challenge in supporting the arts.

Cleveland writers

We all carry images of writers around in our heads. We learn that writers are not like you or me. Writers need extremes of hardship or wealth: Wilfred Owen in the trenches, Anne Frank in her attic, Jeanette Winterson squirrelled away in Ruth Rendell's second home to write her novel. Whatever writers are, they are not ordinary. And yet, most towns lay claim to one or two and have the makings of a scratch writing group. Even Cleveland, though it struggles with the inauspicious literary antecedents detailed by Andy Croft in his article, 'A Hole Like That', has writers.

Some writers live here and simply write, with no connection to local writing networks. This may be a necessity arising from work or home life but others are ambivalent about wider involvement. 'I haven't and never would join a group,' says children's writer Lynn Howells :

> I can see the value but in groups I can't stop giving so there wouldn't be a lot of point. I give talks to groups and listening to their questions and their talk I feel that what matters to me about writing is not what matters to them.

Novelist Barbara Gamble has a different reason for keeping her distance :

> We do a terrible disservice saying anyone can do it, come and join us, because there are fewer and fewer outlets for writers. I sometimes feel very anti "creative writing". The only analogy I can find is somebody who has spent years learning to make beautiful hand-made furniture and some dickhead from MFI comes along saying I know how to do that.

Many of Cleveland's most successful professional writers no longer live here - Barry Unsworth, Nancy Thompson, Pat Barker and Jane Gardam. But if they write about the

area, as the latter two do, they influence the perception of Cleveland as a place for writers. This has not been attractive until recently, when Writearound's combination of locally-based and nationally-published writers has had a positive impact. The *Northern Echo* called it 'the north's liveliest literature festival'. But this stress on accessibility upset some of those involved with writing before the upsurge of activity in the mid-80s.

Developing writing in Cleveland

> I feel very strongly that writing is an apprenticeship you have to go through. If it takes seven years to become a doctor why shouldn't it take a writer seven years? There is a big debate about whether writing is a talent or something you can learn.

During the research I talked to several people about their routes into writing, and school had enormous influence. Often English stood out in an otherwise undistinguished school record. Imaginative writing was a source of real pleasure in primary school, but was cut off abruptly by the demands of secondary school education, especially for those who passed their 11+. It's good to see that writing as a pleasure and a tool of self-development is now extended across the full school curriculum. Although many schools' initiatives, such as the W.H. Smith's poets in schools scheme, are separate from other writing activities there is considerable recognition of the need to connect schools to a wider writing community. This is vital for the coming generations of writers.

However, despite many initiatives seeking to connect school writing to free-standing writing, only a handful of younger writers have joined writing groups and other initiatives. One of the earliest writing residencies, Kath McCreery's at Berwick Hills in the early 80s, worked with adults and children. Writearound puts a lot of effort into activities for children. The new Cleveland Arts' Literature Development Worker post is split between schools and other writing activities. The *Evening Gazette's* 'Notice board' is likely to set work by a thirteen-year old alongside that of a forty-year old. Such initiatives keep the lines between the generations open.

Sometimes projects designed with children in mind ended up serving adults' needs, as was the case with **Bramblethorne Writers**. The original impetus came from a project designed to involve parents in boosting their children's reading and writing skills, but it quickly became apparent that parents also wanted to develop their own creative writing. This was an eye-opener for the teachers :

> If there was one, there could be other talented writers in our midst. In the past we'd only considered that some parents would benefit from adult literacy classes. Whether illiteracy was a majority or a minority problem we simply didn't know. We had assumed it to be the problem of the majority. We were about to discover something that was to change our attitudes and raise our level of expectation.

Not that there needs to be any conflict between creative writing and adult literacy. Many of the ideas about wider access to writing influencing the arts and education originated in adult literacy work. They share the idea that writing is a powerful medium which can increase individual self-esteem and record valuable experience which might otherwise be lost in an over-commercialised literary culture. Many adult literacy initiatives have been concentrated in metropolitan and multi-cultural cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and London and promoted through various national training workshops, writing weekends and a student newspaper. Adult literacy organisers in Cleveland were aware of these developments, but they had not greatly influenced policy. However, there was enthusiasm for the approach at Cleveland Tertiary College, Redcar :

> We have no class of that name, but classes that are to all extents and purposes creative writing. They act as a stepping-stone for students who have developed their ability and confidence. It's an important development from their basic skills. The class is student orientated and self-developmental and it helps with their reading, their self esteem and their confidence.

The extent to which developments in creative writing might be possible was constrained by changes in organisation and funding. At Redcar, there was interest in the possibility of creative writing as a means of enhancing work in adult literacy. Elsewhere, it was more common to respond only if, as was sometimes the case, an individual student showed an interest in creative writing. As Maureen Henderson, an organiser for adult basic education, explained tutors rarely introduce the idea :

> We encourage students to write about themselves and their own lives but that's as far as it goes. We don't set out deliberately to do sessions on creative writing. People come with practical needs. They don't need to go into the world of imagination. If students came with the need we'd provide it, but they don't.

Adult literacy is out in the cold where creative writing is concerned. It would be good to see some crossovers happen. Perhaps adult literacy and creative writing tutors could meet to share ideas about stimulating imaginative writing, or work together to run a writing day for students? Perhaps adult literacy tutors who do encourage expressive writing could suggest sending it to *Write Around The Year* or The *Evening Gazette's* Notice Board ?

But these are hard times for innovation. Recent government reorganisations of further and adult education shifted the emphasis from non-vocational education to vocational training and accreditation. None of this is good news for creative writing, which spans the leisure/art/commerce range in ways that do not fit these rigid distinctions and is particularly resistant to the wholesale introduction of assessment and accreditation. Taking the long view there is a cycle of activities coming into prominence then falling away. This helps to put into perspective the threat people currently feel from the continuing reorganisations of arts and education. Looking back over twenty-five years, we see different cycles of activity as priorities dominate provision or different activists come and go from Cleveland or from writing. Decline is not always natural. Imposed constraints and priorities can bring a premature end.

It would be a great shame if the relationship between adult education and creative writing was to end in this way as, as it has played a key role in developing and sustaining Cleveland's thriving writing culture. Not all adult education is the same, although students are much less conscious of these differences than organisers and tutors. The aims, objectives and nature of the class sessions are very similar. One distinction is between general creative writing courses and those with a more commercial orientation. Another is whether there is a formal syllabus. These usually cover a wide range of forms and introduce students to techniques and skills in a more structured way than the workshops, which tend to concentrate on generating, and responding, to students' writing. This isn't to suggest that having a syllabus necessarily provides good learning. As Heather Bennett, who has taught both, comments :

> A course has to be taught, in a group I don't seem to be doing enough. I feel guilty. Although I do have to find ways to handle very strong personalities. For example, the very critical one who wants to take over, so I split the comments - ask this one to comment on the beginning, someone else on the end and so on. It's a constant act of balance, assessing and reading the group. So, having said I shouldn't be paid, I realise I should. It's being paid for different things.

Arguably, this work can be more demanding. In facilitating a group the tutor simultaneously tries to develop the group's skills in responding to each other's work, encourages them to take responsibility for their own progress in writing and stimulates new writing. This also makes demands of the students, most of whom are surprised but pleased at the informal approach :

> I like the informality. I wouldn't like it very formal, with people being told exactly what to do. That's intimidating, it stops creativity.

When this form of learning and teaching works well it can be very powerful - increasing independence and self-determination amongst students and providing tutors with energising teaching. However, the absence of a formal structure isn't the same as no structure. Unstructured events can become frustrating and chaotic for tutors and students alike, creating a sense of aimlessness.

The University of Leeds' creative writing classes, with one or two exceptions, are provided in Cleveland as part of its community education. This means targeted to reach particular groups of people, for example: women, the unemployed, ethnic minorities; and to those who have not previously had many educational opportunities, for example unable to have stayed on at school or pursue higher education courses. The emphasis is on reducing the barriers to education, so courses are run where people live, course content is designed around student needs and interests and fees are waived. The 1994-5 session offers over twenty community based creative writing courses at venues ranging from Hartlepool to Hemlington, Staithes to Saltburn, Grangetown to Yarm. Also on the community education programme are five specialist workshops: advanced short story, novels, play writing, re-writing skills and women's writing; courses run in association with other organisations, for example Redcar Mind, and a winter poetry-weekend school and a week-long summer school. There is, however, an ambivalence about whether creative writing can or should be integrated into education. This was one of the questions the research as a whole had to consider.

For several years Leeds offered a 'Writing for Pleasure and Profit' course on its main, rather than community, programme. From 1994 this type of adult education class will move closer to mainstream University teaching. Studying for a degree has also become more flexible, with courses broken down into units which students can build into a degree using the credits each successfully-completed module carries. Adult education courses have had to become modules in this scheme, which means they must also be accredited - of which more later. I decided to confront head on the arguments about whether or not creative writing is a proper academic subject by offering a range of courses on the accredited programme. After much discussion these were accepted and for the first time in 1994 specialist courses and an introductory certificate in creative writing will be offered to students in Leeds and Cleveland. It will be interesting to see what they make of them.

This is a long way from the tentative gathering at Hemlington which launched its community based creative writing courses a decade ago. Leeds' involvement in creative writing developed slowly and despite its current near monopoly was not motivated by a desire to dominate. Up until 1987-8 Andy Croft, adult education Lecturer in Literature in Cleveland, described his involvement with the writing scene as a spare time activity:

> I got to very few **Teesside Writers' Workshop** meetings, but I saw myself as a member and that was nothing to do with work, and neither was *Outlet* and then later Writearound. It's not proper stuff with a departmental role at all until the late 80s when I tried to marry what I was doing in one part of my life with the other half.

Andy's involvement, and through him the University of Leeds, arose partly out of his

own interest and partly because the greater involvement of Cleveland's creative writing groups with statutory agencies required professional skills with which, as a result of his job, he was familiar with:

> I'd got experience of chairing meetings and I was the only one with any experience of programme planning and publicity. So the job of organising the programme devolved on me for those first three years, just sort of naturally. It wasn't my choice or my decision.

It's difficult to disentangle voluntary from educational strands in the development of Cleveland's writing culture. This is especially the case because community education, as Andy has argued, aims to develop people and places :

> To give people access to their imaginations, and their own languages and their own experiences: to legitimise the act and process of writing. ... In short, to participate in the slow, slow development of an independent, native, democratic, culture in Cleveland.

Creative writing's uneasy place within education has already been hinted at. The roots of this lie in the development of English as a critical interpretive subject. This means that unlike art or music, where theoretical and historical study is integrated with the practice of the art form itself, the writing process is absent from the academic discipline. This resistance to creative writing is strongest in the old Universities. The new Universities have generally been more experimental and inter-disciplinary in their approach. They have developed Combined Arts degrees and creative writing modules which count towards final degree marks. In the University sector an interest in writing might be encouraged but alongside, rather than within, mainstream work.

In the early 1980s Teesside University launched the Cleveland Literary Society. While based there, it attracted students and had a more critical edge; when it moved (1984-5) to Leeds University's Adult Education Centre at Harrow Road, it added readings to the critical work and by 1988-9, when it was re-launched as Poetry Live!, it was entirely readings based. Within Teesside's Humanities Degree scheme intermittent creative writing and poetry workshops have been offered as elements of courses or freestanding extra curricula workshops. Higher education's most important contribution to the development of creative writing came through some of the students it attracted to the area, who got involved in arts, cultural and community development and stayed on.

Terry Lawson, founder member of Writearound

Harrow Road Wednesday night group at work on their end of year anthology

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'The whole visionary thing': Writing in the Community

We have seen how difficult it is to separate the institutional structures of writing from the voluntary activity that feed into them. This is not surprising: the aim of activism is usually to initiate forms of institutional support which promote their ideals. This process is a complex one. When power shifts from one group of people to another, there is also a shift in the perception of that activity. What looks like success to one might be selling out to another. Keith Armstrong, a poet with many years' involvement in promoting community writing in the North East mistrusts creative writing's recent popularity :

> That phrase raises my class hackles. It seems to differentiate between creative writing and other forms. Creative writing excludes people. It's a meaningless term. I don't think you can say there's an upsurge - acceptance maybe - but I see it as institutionalisation. I have a sense of a down surge in people's creativity.

He sees a conflict of aims in the increased bureaucracy involved in funding community arts projects :

> The whole visionary thing of local people doing their own thing wasn't all wrapped around funding like it is these days. Being paid changes things. You become someone with expertise, someone to tell them what to do and how to do it. The hurdle to get over is me being the tutor. I want to be one of them really.

The most powerful thing in this statement is that final sentence. Activism, of whatever kind, usually means ceasing to be 'one of them' and joining the minority. In Cleveland, we see a process where people began by doing it 'for ourselves' and end up either disillusioned, as institutionalisation moves them out of the frame, or simply worn out by struggling with those contradictions and the enormous effort it takes to sustain activism. It's uncomfortable to see the extent to which professionalisation has been a source of employment for outsiders, not insiders. This is not necessarily a criticism of the people holding those jobs - I am, after all, one of them - but there is a pattern: groundwork activism from one set of people creates opportunities taken advantage of by others.

Voluntary networks feed into and interact with education, the media and arts bodies, but they are also differentiated within themselves. The main catalysing forces around voluntary activity are: politics, sometimes left-wing, sometimes feminist; the desire to succeed on a professional or semi-professional basis in the market place of writing and literature and the desire to make a difference within the community. Students often play key roles in such networks, although increased pressure on finance during courses and employment prospects at the end of them may undermine this.

Individuals, such as Trevor Teasdel, who came to the area as students but had previous experience of community arts played a central role in developing opportunities for writing. But a little earlier, there had been feminism. It played a part in the women writers' group that Durham University organised at its Stockton Adult Education Centre in the early 1980s and in the region's initiatives around the national promotion of women in arts and entertainment, Women Live in 1982. Women Live coincided with the setting up of the Village Arts Project based in East Cleveland and provided a focus for some of its earliest work. The writing group that developed there took on a strong campaigning role focusing on unemployment in the region and produced a successful anthology, *The Cleveland Way*, as well as providing a meeting point and focus for writing activity in East Cleveland. It also modelled the pattern of group involvement in writing and publishing that came to characterise the Cleveland writing scene in the mid 1980s. This early feminist involvement is submerged in later developments. There are a number of

explanations for this, including the general decline in feminism, but it has a particular edge in Cleveland, where one consequence of the 1980s child sexual abuse cases was a profoundly damaging split amongst local feminists.

Activism culminated in the Writearound Festival, whose importance it is difficult to underestimate. It's unique among literary festivals. Though many these days have some involvement from the local writing culture, nowhere else is such prominence given to the local scene. The big names come in on local terms. As Alyson Perry, involved from the early days, put it :

> Terry and Trev who invented it were very clear it wouldn't be wheeling up the greats from London, but a local forum. As it's got more successful we have gone more towards big names, but we try to get a balance. My aim for Writearound is that it should be a celebration of Cleveland writing. We're declaring writing by and for and about Cleveland people to be a good thing.

A whole series of activities around writing gradually came together and were then caught up in a vision rooted in community arts, rather than educational or literary, values.

Forms of Activity

The most usual form this takes is the writers' group, relatively simple both to organise and sustain. Two groups were founded in the early 1960s, **Middlesbrough Writers Group** and **Poetry 20+**. **Middlesbrough Writers Group** takes a writers' circle approach, supporting writing across all genres with an emphasis on professional, market-led approaches. Various activities, including guest speakers, are organised but the focus is firmly on members' independent commitment to writing and publishing. **Poetry 20+** originally met at The University of Leeds' Adult Education Centre at Harrow Road as an independent society before moving to Acklam Library. This illustrates the changing relationship between adult education and local culture, from passive to active. Twenty years on, adult education plays a shaping role in cultural provision, in keeping with the trend to promote access rather than elitism in education. After a series of illnesses and deaths amongst its founding, and still core, members **Poetry 20+** ceased to meet in 1993. During its lifetime the group's interest in poetry was expressed in activities based around the classic tradition of poetry as well as members' own writing.

Other groups formed in the early 1970s: a poetry group at Guisborough and **Brotton Writers**. These groups tend to be initiated and sustained by one or two enthusiasts, have an inward rather than outward focus, and less of a commercial inflection than the writers' circles. Throughout the 1970s they were also often identified with left wing or radical politics. Until the late 1970s the writing culture of Cleveland was shaped by the perception of writing as a singular and largely solitary activity that was realised or validated in publication. The forms of association that developed sustained rather than challenged this perception. Something changed in the mid to-late-70s, when the effect of trends and movements in the political and social sphere begun to register as the democratisation of a previously individualised cultural experience. These changes do not always impinge upon participants, who may continue to write the same things in exactly the same way. But they influence the activists whose interventions in the late 1970s and early 1980s transformed the values and infrastructure of creative writing in Cleveland.

As with the groups, the stimulus often came from visionary individuals. Arguably, this occurs frequently enough to be constant, the variable is the combination of material conditions and personal qualities of leadership and organisation. In the early 1980s higher education was a relatively protected space for students. Some, like Trevor Teasdel, came wanting to get involved in their new community :

> I was going to be here for three years and I thought I'd try and contribute something towards the arts scene. I wanted it to be related to needs rather than superimposing something that either wasn't needed or was already being provided. Eventually a need found me - Cleveland Writers.

The material factors which nurtured change in creative writing activities in the early 80s were the growth in impact and influence of the community arts movement, the peace movement, feminism and the Communist Party, with its longstanding commitment to cultural politics. Community arts and feminism provided rationale and subject matter for activities designed to seek out, celebrate and share experience. The focus on experience emphasised what was unique, but not exceptional, and sought to define common identity - as women, young people, or members of a particular region. In practical terms this led to a number of initiatives from students at Teesside. *Poetic Licence* (1982) a local open access magazine with a broad local appeal and *Station Identification* (1983) a more avant garde magazine, both edited by Anne Wainwright and Pamela Hutson. The Multi Media Society (1981), which acted as a promoter for events and organised various workshops and The Castalians (1982), a performance space at the Dovecot Arts Centre. There were also initiatives that came directly from social movements. Women Live 1982 and the subsequent *Cleveland Way* publications, group meetings and television programme from feminists in East Cleveland and *Voice of the North* from a CND and ecology activist. The latter, when relaunched as *Cleveland Peace News*, established the distribution procedure of utilising the library network later adopted by the specialist creative writing magazines *Outlet* and *Write Around the Year*.

The momentum generated drew in a wide range of individuals motivated by interests in writing themselves and/or encouraging writing in others, community development, and publishing. Student activists finished their courses and stayed on, continuing to be involved in community arts and writing projects. They were helped to do this by the increased support at that time for such projects from the local authorities who set up Village Arts and Cleveland Arts in 1982 and Community Arts Middlesbrough in 1984. Also, a new intake of students were getting involved in existing initiatives and later promoted their own - Entertaining Hope (1987) and Teesside Poly Arts Festival (1989.)

Outlets

> I'd like to be published. If we're honest, it's what we all want.

The range and quality of outlets for publication a region offers its writers is an important index of the extent to which writing activities have moved beyond self perpetuation and can be said to influence the wider culture and community. Although many write for their own pleasure and are content with the audience a writing group provides, publication is always the ghost at creative writing gatherings.

Collaborating with local radio to promote writing is considered innovative. In Cleveland this innovation has a history going back twenty years to **Housecall**, presented first by Mike Hollingsworth, then Bill Hunter. **Housecall** is a Sunday morning programme on Radio Cleveland combining music with listeners' poems. There is an associated monthly writers group, meeting in Norton. In addition to a focus and outlet for poetry, the programme publicises other writing initiatives and has offered various forms of support to new magazines over the years, for example *Poetic Licence*. Radio Cleveland continues to support **Housecall** and writing initiatives more generally. Most recently this took the form of broadcasting *Charlie Is My Darling*, a Cleveland-based soap which ran for forty episodes (1992-3) before funding problems brought it to an untimely end.

The local newspaper the *Evening Gazette* has always taken an interest in writing and publishing activities, especially those with a reminiscence or local history feel to them. However, recent years have seen them take an increasingly important role in supporting

literary activities. In 1990 'Notice board' was launched. This provides an outlet for readers' work, usually poetry, and a forum to publicise events and activities. The page is edited by Andy Croft and has recently become a weekly feature.

In 1993 the *Evening Gazette* gave considerable support and publicity to the Writearound children's anthology. There were features throughout the run-up period, winning poems and authors were showcased and an insert, containing the anthology poems, was printed. In 1994 it continued this support and extended it to the festival as a whole. It also offered generous sponsorship to the research project's photographic exhibition *'You Don't Look Like a Writer'*. The *Northern Echo*, the region's other daily newspaper, produced an arts supplement, *The Page*, from 1989 until 1994. This offered features as well as reviews and listings across the art forms throughout the Northern Arts region. Writing activities in Cleveland were reported, although in less detail as time went on. Innovation or grand old age constitutes newsworthiness, although the real art - and slog - of cultural development lies in sustaining initiatives once the first heady stages are past. Continued, imaginative support from the local media is a great asset. Elsewhere writing activities may merit a one or two sentence paragraph in passing. Community newspapers and the free news sheet have also played their part.

The writing residencies of the mid 80s established the idea of group anthologies, and the majority of free-standing and tutored groups produce regular anthologies. These vary enormously in scope and quality in both production and content. The emphasis is usually on including something from everyone rather than selective editing, and groups have different access to print facilities. However, it is good to see that groups which have produced two or three collections usually improve as they go on. **Teesside Writers' Workshop** was very committed to publication, and early on launched a series of pamphlets and poster poems. One aspect of publishing which has declined is local performances. These happen as part of the Writearound Festival, but it is striking how little circulation there is between writing groups.

The big exception is Asian writers. The *mushaira* is a celebration and performance of Urdu poetry, quite unlike the low key poetry readings of our own culture. There is audience participation, food and drink and it lasts for hours. Cleveland is an important centre for Urdu poetry, its regular *mushaira* attract celebrated poets - and audiences - from the Midlands and the whole of the North. But it is striking how racially segregated writing activities are in Cleveland. Although some white people, usually working in the arts or education, attend mushaira, it is predominantly an Asian event, whereas the activities making up the bulk of the research - writing groups, courses, publications and events - are predominantly white. During the research I came into contact with well over 300 people and barely half a dozen of them were from ethnic minorities. Separate space is important, but opportunities for pleasurable, valuable exchanges are being lost. Public performance is a way of sharing and promoting work which costs far less in time or money than anthologies. The absence of exchange between groups can also give the impression that people are only interested in their own work :

> You meet people who are so eager for you to read their stuff, but they don't want to read yours.

This imbalance between writing and reading has also dogged the more ambitious and selective publishing initiatives which, because of their production costs, have to sell a fair number of copies. It's not just a question of money either, the whole activity of promoting and developing writing is called into question if people aren't interested in the writing being produced.

Cleveland sustains an impressive range of publishing initiatives with local, regional and national audiences. These include **Paranoia Press**, *Tees Valley Writer, Scratch* and **Mudfog Press** and the competition and open submission anthologies connected with Writearound. As with all small press and magazine publishing, these initiatives have to

work hard to keep going, a struggle partly about sales but also partly about the quality of submissions. As Derek Gregory, editor of *Tees Valley Writer,* says :

> If we miscalculated the market at all it was that we weren't getting the number of quality entries from Cleveland we had supposed. The whole creative writing thing has blown up into a football pool. If you get the hang of a few rules then you have as good a chance as anyone else. This is what's promoted by the writers' magazines, *Writers' Monthly* and so on. One of our missions is to puncture this fairy balloon put up by people who just want to make money out of people's desire to be writers.

Publishing is one of the main beneficiaries of regional arts funding. As part of the huge Northern Arts area, and at the furthest southern and eastern edges, it sometimes feels as if Cleveland's fallen off the map. Cleveland doesn't get much of a look in at the Northern Arts Fellowship, for example, jointly funded by Northern Arts and the Universities of Durham and Newcastle. Publishing initiatives are also concentrated on Tyneside. Northern Arts, unusually these days, supports individual writers through awards. Only in the last couple of years have Cleveland writers been successful in gaining these awards and they've tended to be the smaller ones. Northern Arts runs a residential writing school and offers bursaries for students to attend. During the course of the research I only came across two writers who had received assistance to attend this school. It may be people don't know what's there to apply for or think they don't stand a chance, but during the research requests to help fund the Creative Writing Summer School, Poetry Winter School and photography project were responded to positively.

The absence of a distinctively literary culture in Cleveland and the influence of community arts values and practises has resulted in a writing culture characterised by its emphasis on public and collective forms of activity. A high premium is set on making creative writing accessible to groups and individuals who have been least entitled to it. That this laid down strengths and stored up problems, has been apparent from the outset. As one of its founders said :

> **Teesside Writers' Workshop** was one of the most lively and enjoyable and productive groups during 1985, but the conflicts that beset the group at the beginning were never fully resolved. John and his friends were used to more critical, high-level discussion whereas the other members needed encouragement. As the group was set up as a community arts project, our commitment had to be to those who needed most help.

The research discovered conflict over different levels of provision to be perennial.

The mid 1980s were a period of consolidation amongst writing groups, with an increasing emphasis on performance. This came to prominence partly because of political and campaigning groups, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Friends of the Earth organising events as part of wider campaigns or for fund raising purposes. In addition to providing performance space in this way, many of the activists in **Teesside Writers' Workshop**, Writearound and other writing initiatives were members of the Communist Party. The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, with groups on Tyneside and in County Durham, pursued a strategy of regional development during this period. The intention was both to strengthen networks between member groups and make connections between Federation and non-Federation local arts activities. This created, through the Write Together Events (1985-7) a series of opportunities for activists to meet and exchange ideas with people from other regions. However, they stayed local rather than getting involved in the North East as a whole. This reflects Cleveland's geographical and cultural isolation as well as being an understandable response to the patronising attitudes held by outsiders :

> In 1986 the Write Together events got going and I remember we held one

> in Darlington as a sop to the Teessiders. I have a sense of Newcastle as the centre of the region. I don't like Middlesbrough much as a place, a bleakness comes over my soul when I think about it.

Fortunately, not everyone shares this attitude. As Jenny Attala, responsible for Literature at Northern Arts comments :

> Cleveland is homogeneous enough to be genuinely inclusive. The Writearound competition is just the right thing to discover talent amongst the grass roots. There will be loads and loads of really awful stuff but good writers too. Cleveland desperately wants a regional identity because it hasn't got a very positive one. The tension created between the national and the local in terms of what the regional identity would be and who it looks to can be stimulating and positive. But it can be negative. For instance, people really limit themselves by shunning some of the events that bring in national writers.

Within Cleveland the emphasis turned to forms of unifying and publicising, in the broadest sense of the word, creative writing activity which was by now well established. This led to the formation of *Outlet* (1986) and Writearound (1989), initiatives sustained largely by people who had been involved in earlier activities such as **Teesside Writers Workshop**, the Berwick Hills Writing Residency and the WEA. *Outlet* was primarily, as the name suggests, a place for people to send their work, but it also acted as a discussion forum and information exchange. The editorial policy brought the group into conflict with Northern Arts, who questioned the community arts ethos, expressed as an emphasis on first time publication by new writers, a low key production style and its rejection of traditional literary values in favour of encouraging and recognising effort. Nevertheless Northern Arts funded *Outlet* for a number of issues, as did Cleveland County Council.

The magazine unified creative writing activities, but also identified gaps and needs. Because Trevor Teasdel was heavily involved in *Outlet*, the WEA and other forms of activism at the time these connections became mutually supportive and developmental. Members of one group, for example, who complained of having to travel were guided through the procedures of setting up a local group via the WEA, and that founding meeting was advertised to local contacts. In this and other ways the importance of *Outlet* as a prototype of literature development can be seen. However it's important to make the distinction that this activity was being done on a voluntary basis by the people concerned. Money was given strictly for production, distribution and promotion. No one was paid for their time and effort. The tension between professional and voluntary arts development is characteristic of community arts provision and Cleveland did not escape.

The success of *Outlet* helped to strengthen the plans for a writing festival which became Writearound. The idea arose on one of the car journeys to a writing event on Tyneside. People wanted Cleveland to host these kinds of events, to have big name writers come to them too and for such festivals to give a central rather than sideline role to local writing and writers. Because the festival had its origins in this sense of exclusion and marginalisation, being county wide rather than just Middlesbrough-based has always been vital. Middlesbrough has always had a greater concentration of writing activities, partly because of the Universities and because for a long time it had the main WEA branch, but also because the Borough Council has always been keener to fund writing events than Cleveland's other three borough councils. A recent change in arts funding policy devolved money from the region to local arts development agencies. The local areas have a responsibility towards the arts in general rather than the full range of art forms. Stockton, for example, gives minimal support to literature and writing, but promotes the street festival, theatre initiatives and the Dovecot Arts Centre. Langbaurgh supports a wonderful summer programme of outdoor theatre that leaves little over for writing. It was hard to get a sense of Hartlepool's approach because of staffing changes during the period of the research.

At the outset there were tensions about whether Writearound belonged with community or literary arts. It was decided to go for the literary road, but to keep as many of the principles and values of community arts as possible. For this reason it was Cleveland Arts and Northern Arts who were approached rather than local community arts organisations. The early meetings were difficult, as Jenny Attala recalls :

> Total chaos. Andy held it together and moved it on because he had the ability to organise and to organise others. It wouldn't have happened without someone who could do that.

At this point the focus of writing development in Cleveland started to shift from amateur voluntary activists to the professionals. This was not a conspiracy. It's a trend that is easier to see with hindsight, especially if you weren't involved. The conflict over 'middle class managers' has a long history. I first encountered it amongst the Liverpool writing groups in the Federation, kicking against the University Adult Education Department. Cleveland is unusual in that the activists were there first, and in a sense asked for the involvement of professionals in order to legitimate their activities and gain access to resources. Yet gradually activists lose the balance of power. It's always easy to romanticise these conflicts and idealise the past. From the outset Writearound, just like *Outlet* and all the societies and groups that preceded it, was meshed into forms of institutional provision and their structures of power. The formalisation of this in paid administrators and development workers can become problematic, especially if these positions are held by newcomers, but it's also true that outsiders make wonderful scapegoats for tensions and conflicts that may always have been present.

I hope this brief history of the Cleveland writing scene has demonstrated both the uniqueness and the strength of a writing culture that keeps its feet on the ground. I hope also to have shown the extent to which conflicts of interest and direction have been as constant as the development of the movement itself. Finally, people talk about 'The Cleveland Writing Movement' as if it is and has always been one thing. The impression I have, as an outsider, is that while there is an unusual degree of common purpose amongst writers in Cleveland, and the area has established a pattern of shared involvement in events, activities and publications, there are actually many purposes. More acknowledgment of this plurality would strengthen the whole.

Kenny Foxton, the Shy Viking Poet at a Sunday lunchtime performance in the Cleveland Hotel

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Enter The Researcher

> We're losing two hours for some faceless organisation that wants to know what we're doing.

Recently adult education has been closely scrutinised, caricatured as 'tap dancing on the rates', squeezed by increased fees and confounded with ever-tighter regulation. It was not an auspicious moment for a stranger to sit in on classes with a clipboard in one hand and a set of questions in the other. One angry member of Ormesby group felt I was there 'to see if the group is worthwhile. To stop them happening. You're a little spy.' Her anger was understandable. Evaluation, especially on the lips of central government officials, has come to mean finding something to cut. This was never my role, but inevitably people felt threatened rather than thrilled by the undertaking. The research *did* have an interest in what people were doing in creative writing groups and classes across Cleveland and I *did* want to know the value of the activity.

The research always had at least two distinct agendas. One was set by 'the faceless organisation', the Department of Adult Continuing Education at the University of Leeds, who sponsored the research project and also fund most of creative activity in Cleveland. They wanted to know if resources were being used appropriately and effectively. But this was always more than simply checking up. Recognising how popular creative writing courses were, Leeds wanted to know if there was scope to expand. Perhaps the courses had stimulated a need for more specialised or advanced work ? Perhaps tutors felt in need of a forum for support or training ? Perhaps links could be made between creative writing and other subject areas, such as Literature or New Opportunities for Women? They were also concerned about the impact of impending major changes in adult continuing education.

The second agenda came from within the writing activity itself, motivated by the belief that it would be valuable for those involved, especially those who had been active in developing opportunities, to take stock of where it was all going. Although some people took a no-nonsense approach to this question - 'The expansion is testament to its success. You don't need a research project to find that out'- others saw a value in re-examining and discussing what they were doing and why. There was particular interest in collecting examples of good practice in running and supporting groups for new people getting involved - be they adult education providers or would-be-writers or tutors. It could be challenging, as tutor Margaret Wilkinson found :

> I think these things all the time, but not with someone to write it down. In my mind it's always in process. These words are so finite.

But the research did provide an opportunity to address some of the problematic issues in the work. As Stan Grosvenor, co-author of *Charlie is My Darling* said :

> I don't think any of us would have carried out the self-analysis that Rebecca's questions prompted. I'm not sure we ever will know the answers, this isn't a science where you can measure results, but asking the question is vital.

My background meant not only that I shared a sense of the problems but also wanted to help solve them. A little spy I might have been, but I looked inwards as well as around me. As the poet Denise Levertov said: 'It is your own well / Go down to its depths.' But why were so many people threatened by my questions ? Part of the answer is to do with the nature and purpose of any research work. Because I had an eye to the policy makers I knew the research had to be carried out in ways that would reassure them as to its integrity and validity. This put a requirement on the research project not simply to assert the need for or benefit of what went on, but to offer reliable evidence to prove the case. This meant it had to be as extensive as possible, be based on unprompted answers

and include a means of comparing one set of responses with another.

The research world constantly debates objectivity: can the researcher ever really have the neutrality expected of them ? My way of dealing with this was to separate the project into two parts. In the first part, when I was visiting groups and classes and interviewing tutors and organisers, I tried to follow an objective research method. This highlighted a number of issues and questions about creative writing activity. Some research projects would have stopped there, but we wanted to do more than that. So, in the second phase, I devised a series of events and activities to involve students, tutors and group members in actually working through some of the issues which had come up. Although this was done rigorously and carefully, there was no pretence at being objective: the main aim was to protect and improve the activity.

I sought to be objective by being clear about the purpose of the various research activities I carried out. I asked open, not closed, questions and used the same set of questions with each group so that I had a basis for comparison. Sometimes I collected information about the people I spoke to, to see if educational or social factors influenced attitudes at all.

Questions make or break research. Imagine the kind of answer you get from the question: 'Do you like your writing group?' compared with: 'What is it you like about your writing group?' The first gives you numbers - x people did or didn't like the writing group - the other gives you a feel for the experience and the issues within the group. Numbers count, but not for everything so I set out to gather evidence that would be partly numerical and partly experiential. I did this in order to understand the genuinely shared features - positive or problematic - of the writing activity. Which meant I often asked headbangingly obvious questions, like: 'What do you do in your group?' which must have left some people wondering why the research was being done by someone so apparently clueless. These questions had another valuable function. Not only were they easy to answer, which gave people confidence for more challenging questions, but they were sometimes deceptive in their simplicity. Having to think and talk about what you do and why, instead of just getting on and doing it, can be very valuable, as a member of **Vane Women** observed :

> This is interesting, we've never discussed this before. I think we're going to learn a lot about each other tonight.

It led to all sorts of changes, some of which are easy to see: such as the Redcar course re-arranging the way the chairs were set out or **Guisborough Writers'** decision to meet fortnightly; some are less tangible, like the discussion in several groups about giving feedback or the realisation that students often saw the role of the tutor differently from their tutors. Contributing to change in this way is, for me, an essential part of doing research. Since this research had a developmental dimension, the part of the project which worked with groups on various practical activities was very important. Because even those who took part will only have a partial view of what went on, I will summarise the main activities.

I spent the first few months of the project letting people know about it. I sent out information leaflets to the press, libraries, community centres and arts agencies in the county, as well as contacts from Writearound and University of Leeds' courses. I also wrote to local groups and tutors asking if they were willing to take part in the research.

The response was encouraging, with most groups and individuals keen to participate. During the research project I visited seven groups and eight courses at least once and several times in some instances. This enabled me to talk to approximately 175 people in structured group discussions. I also interviewed eighteen writers, twelve tutors, four editors of magazines and eight activists or arts workers and the special projects extended the numbers of people involved. I also had contact with relevant groups and individuals outside the region.

The research was supervised and supported by two groups. One was internal to the University of Leeds, it met every three months and in addition to Andy Croft and myself there were two senior members of the Department of Adult Continuing Education. During the first year of the research there was also a local group. This was made up of Andy and myself plus Linda Innes, Arts Equality Officer for Cleveland Arts and Trevor Teasdel, long standing writing tutor and activist. During the second year, when the research entered a more participatory phase, we adopted a number of measures to increase access to the research project. These included: open meetings to discuss findings and proposed activities; a research newsletter mailed to all the groups and individuals who had expressed interest in the project and a series of specialist working groups.

It was also vital to develop a feel for the region and its writers. Luckily, I started work during Writearound. It was the best introduction I could have had and I was later co-opted onto the committee where I found a role developing *Write Around The Year*. I attended two thirds of the 1992 festival events. I chose on the basis of geography (Hartlepool, rural East Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Stockton) and the type of event (well-known outside performer, local group reading, reader emphasis, specialised writers' workshop etc). This provided me with an opportunity to meet the various writers' groups and writing activists in the region and gave them a chance to meet me. Writearound had not previously collected any systematic information about its audience and I saw a mutual benefit in doing so and quickly devised a questionnaire which was distributed during the festival. The returns helped me picture the audience for reading and writing events and gave a sense of local attitudes towards creative writing. I found many people came along by chance or at a friend's suggestions and that fewer people than I'd expected attended every year. I also noticed writers groups tended to stick to their own patch. Writearound learnt more about their actual and potential audience. I realised I had to explore the general public's attitude towards reading and writing in more detail. This survey work established a theme, barriers to involvement, which ran right through the research and forms the next section.

Writing Workshop at Margrove Heritage Centre

Barriers to Involvement

> I know I shouldn't really, but I'd feel inferior.

The growth of writing activity in Cleveland since the mid 1980s does tell us a need is being met, but it doesn't say if all the needs are met or that everyone who could be involved is. Librarian and Writearound committee member Alyson Perry believes :

> Writearound has made a difference, particularly in Redcar and Middlesbrough. It's raised the writing profile. Anyone likely to be getting interested in writing would be catching on by now.

Another librarian I met during the survey said :

> Not everybody who reads a book wants to write one, you know. Those that want to write do it, those that don't, don't.

Were they right? I spent several weeks at the beginning of 1993 visiting libraries throughout the county - Redcar, Guisborough, Yarm, Acklam, North Ormesby and Berwick Hills - talking to library users. I spoke with 161 people and asked them if they knew a writing class met in their library and if they had heard of Writearound. I asked about their own reading and writing and whether they had ever gone along to writing courses or poetry readings. The findings were exciting and depressing. Exciting because they confirmed that writing matters :

> I've thought about writing. I think everyone does.

> In every person there's one good book, if only about their past.

Writing was a minority interest - only 12% of the sample would, or had, joined a writers' group and a further 9% said they would seriously consider it. 22% of the sample described themselves as currently writing but not in or intending to join a writing group. But it was a significant minority, especially as a recent opinion poll found that, if money was no object, 13% would choose writing as a *career*.

The confirmation that we were right to direct time, energy and money towards writing was inspiring, but I also learnt things which were deeply depressing. Although there were writing classes in the libraries I surveyed, and Writearound is promoted through the library service, very few people were aware of their existence: 71% didn't know a writing group met in their library and 91% had never heard of Writearound. But this wasn't just a lack of information. We are up against more powerful barriers than that. A third of those who hadn't known about Writearound expressed an interest in attending. Sadly, their interest was overwhelmed by feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy. 'I'd feel it wasn't for me, that I wasn't clever enough,' said one. 'I'd feel out of place amongst all those professional people', said another.

People didn't really know what went on at groups and readings, and they imagined the worst. These comments reminded me of the groups, when I asked people what they had expected at their first meeting. This was the most humbling part of the research: listening to accounts of vulnerability and trepidation from over half the members of every group visited. We must never lose sight of the great courage it takes to walk through that door :

> I said to my wife: stop by the phone, I'll be home in half an hour.

> People don't understand, it isn't like cake decorating. Because writing comes out of inside you, you feel criticised in a way you wouldn't if the tutor said the icing was wrong.

Those people who were not currently writing, but would have liked to, had on the whole enjoyed doing English at school, as had many of those in writing groups. Life, in the form of marriage, work and children, had got in the way of writing. Some people found their way back, as these comments from creative writing group members about why they joined a group show :

> My writing has been squelched under a massive depression and worry. I'm looking for a kick start.
>
> I always wanted to be a writer. I left school and had kids. Now I've the time and the enthusiasm, but not the skill.
>
> This is the first time I've had time to do things I wanted. I've been writing on and off since I was a child.

Everybody felt the same sort of anxiety and inadequacy, so why do some grit their teeth and walk through the door while others don't ? Talking to group members, common catalysts began to emerge. Major changes in lifestyle, to do with unemployment, bereavement or retirement often spurred people on. Availability of courses was also important, but it was interesting how few people went looking for courses to join. In fact, it was usually only as a result of having done a course that people looked for another one. This was especially so with return to learning courses, where students did a little bit of creative writing, liked it and were then encouraged by their tutors to join a creative writing group. In the main, students tended to stumble across creative writing groups at a time when other changes in their life predisposed them to give it a go. And finally an awful lot of people came because they had a friend or relation to come with :

> I said to Paul, it might be full of wordy old trouts, but at least we'll have a laugh.
>
> To be honest, I wouldn't have come for myself. I only came because my friend felt a bit nervous. I might never have got here. It wouldn't have occurred to me.

Clearly, as Colleen Drury felt :

> There are a lot of talented people buried in the house. I don't think people would write without encouragement.

My experience, from the survey of awareness and attitudes towards creative writing, confirms this. So how is that encouragement best given ? It isn't enough just to put the courses on. People have to realise writing groups are unlikely to be full of 'professional people, published writers' or 'tweedy, earnest types'. Publications are often seen as a way of getting this across, but seeing work in print can confirm the hesitant would-be member's impression of being outclassed.

After some thought, I decided photographs were the surest way to prove that perfectly ordinary people attend writing groups. So, with the help of Mark Robinson and Bob Beagrie, we launched the *'You Don't Look Like A Writer'* project in Spring 1994. It was designed to challenge some of the stereotypes about who is and isn't entitled to be a writer and to offer a glimpse into the world of writing groups. We commissioned Dermot Blackburn to photograph groups, events and individuals. The result is the photographs in this report, a touring exhibition and a bank of photographs to be used to publicise future writing events and activities.

The Wider Context

The research was concerned with the full spectrum of creative writing activity - including those not available in Cleveland and all the different uses made in education of creative writing. I also felt that although Cleveland lay at the heart of the research, our findings would have greater credibility if they were set in a wider context. We decided not to do a national survey of creative writing courses because the re-organisation and national review of adult continuing education meant the best we could hope for was a snapshot of a rapidly-changing scene. We also had our own uncertainty about whether the project would be funded for one or two years which made it difficult to include a control study of another region. But we didn't want our findings dismissed as peculiar to Cleveland.

As a compromise we publicised the project in West Yorkshire using arts and educational networks. Responses were followed up with postal questionnaires or telephone interviews. We received enquiries from eight tutors and thirty-nine students or group members. This gave us some data for comparative analysis and while our main findings were confirmed by those of West Yorkshire, there were some interesting differences. Of particular interest was the extent to which critical views were expressed about specific tutors and writing groups and about the whole idea of teaching creative writing :

> The 'teacher' can't write or she'd be doing just that. Maybe she's had a few letters to the editor printed, maybe she's an English teacher by day and saw a way to make a bob or two. Even if she is capable of passing on the little she knows, it is unlikely to be what the audience wants to hear. They KNOW they can write.

I explored two types of creative writing provision - correspondence and residential courses - which differ from the kind most Cleveland writers had experience of. I approached correspondence courses, but only had responses from the two educationally based ones, the National Extension College and the Open College of The Arts. The former run two writing courses : *Creative Writing* and *Writing for Everyone* and include two writing courses, *Berthing* and *Mothers of Invention* in their women's writing course. The Open College of The Arts run a foundation course: *Starting To Write* and two specialist courses: *The Experience of Poetry* and *Storylines*, with others in the pipeline. Nobody from Cleveland had registered on these courses, although I did come across perhaps a dozen instances of people who were currently, or had once enrolled on commercial correspondence courses.

I would have liked to pursue the experience of studying creative writing as a distance learning student with Cleveland residents, but was unable to do so. Pat Bryant, a Sussex based tutor, who wrote *Creative Writing* agreed to circulate her students with my questions. Their reasons for enrolling were similar to those of people joining groups, although as with the Open College of the Arts there were people for whom joining groups was not an option because of domestic responsibilities, disability or geographical isolation. As some of the students had also attended writing groups, they were able to make comparisons. They felt the correspondence course offered a more intensive and challenging course of study, whereas the groups were aimed at beginners or very advanced writers. All respondents appreciated the detailed feedback their work received from the tutor.

Graham Mort of the Open College of the Arts feels correspondence courses are particularly appropriate for writers :

> Correspondence offers an extraordinary advantage in terms of tuition. You can work in detail, you have privacy and intimacy. Students tend to come at critical points in their lives. Writing is not therapeutic but there is a confessional role in the way the course uses experience as a starting point and then offers a very graduated set of stages to work on that.

Writearound offers its prizewinners cash or a week's course at Arvon. I wrote to former prizewinners to establish who had gone to Arvon and how they had got on. Surprisingly, only four had done so and of those, only two responded to my questions. The low take up may simply be a confirmation of how difficult people's personal circumstances are and against what pressures they write. But it could also be a sign of insularity, a refusal to engage with the world out there, an impression confirmed by the low take up amongst Clevelanders of places on Northern Arts' Residential Summer School.

Both writers taking the Arvon option saw it as a chance to 'get serious', one had her expectations met, the other, unfortunate in picking a badly-tutored course, didn't. Arvon attracts writers from across the spectrum: from those just thinking about starting to those who are proficient and published in one form who want to experiment in another; but it consistently plays a part in pushing the committed amateur towards professional or semi-professional status. It does this by offering something which cannot be easily re-created elsewhere, as Mark Illis, Centre Director at Arvon, Lumb Bank explained :

> Students are encouraged to look more critically at their own writing and exposed to published professional writers as a way of removing writing's mystique. If you look at the number of writers that have come through Arvon, even if they would have made it anyway, Arvon helped that process, maybe accelerated it. That's a good by-product, but it's not what it's all about. We want to give people a good experience of writing.

Arvon is unique in its ability to combine open access with a commitment to professionalism and quality. These are usually perceived - and sometimes are - in opposition: community versus literary arts, education versus the arts. Part of the research brief was to explore the relationship between arts and educational provision. I did so by reading various policy documents and interviewing key local figures. The clearest thing there was the cyclical nature of ideas about the role of the arts and the tyranny of innovation. Educational values, with their democratic, inclusive emphasis have shaped arts policy for the last seven or eight years. However, there are signs now of a backlash, with an increased emphasis on quality and standards as the focus shifts to the professional, rather than amateur arts. Graeme Rigby, a former community arts worker, better known locally as editor of *The Page*, identifies this as a problem with Community Arts' emphasis on process not product :

> 'Everybody can do it, everybody is creative', are the driving forces of community arts and I think those are too great claims.

Mark Robinson is also aware of the contradictions and tensions in his job as Literature Development Worker :

> There's more to life than the 'community'. That's an incredibly important thing to develop but it's how you develop it. Are you doing it for people's personal benefits, community development reasons or because you're actually looking for new writers who are going to go on and get published nationally ? The way my job is set up I'm supposed to be doing all three. That's definitely a conflict in my job.

I share these concerns, but do not see process and product or art and the community as inevitable oppositions. Perhaps, as tutor Margaret Weir suggests, arts strategists could learn something from sport :

> In sport you don't just encourage Olympic prospects, it's sport for all. I think that analogy works for writing. At whatever level, as long as it is honest and as long as people are doing their personal best, it is important.

Education or Art?

As well as my interest in adult literacy, I am a strong supporter of writing workshops as part of Second Chance courses. They give students a space in which to develop their writing skills and to reflect upon and share the huge process of change they are embarking on. I spent some time with the tutors on the New Opportunities for Women course that had been running at the Centre for a number of years. Although tutors did not feel entirely confident about introducing creative writing sessions, they did invite local writers to come in and lead sessions for them. I was asked to do this for each of the years that the research project ran. In the session I encouraged the group to think about who and what - including themselves - censored their impulse to write, as well as doing a writing exercise. Gail Henegan, Course Director, was so impressed at the improvement in people's confidence with writing after my first visit, that the following year she decided to keep a systematic account of the writing students did before and after the creative writing session in order to explore whether it had increased their confidence in writing. She decided there were a number of positive outcomes. Students were encouraged to see themselves as writers and to overcome the first hurdle of reading their writing aloud to the whole class. Far from being put off by the creative writing aspect, students with the right sort of encouragement - and in particular knowing that everybody had to do the writing task - actually found it easier. The record of students attempting optional out-of-class writing work showed a marked increase before and after the creative writing sessions.

Its seems reasonable to presume that people who like to write also like to read, and that people who enjoy reading might occasionally get the urge to have a go themselves. But in fact these two activities often appear in conflict. Both Andy and I work as literature and creative writing tutors, and it puzzled us why the two groups seemed so separate. Were people put off by the cost of literature courses compared to the free creative writing classes - or did they think that if the course was free, it couldn't be of much value ? Were people forced to choose because of pressures of time ? Did people think of literature and creative writing as completely separate activities ? The best way to find out was to ask them, so we circulated a postal questionnaire to all current literature students. The response was an overwhelming silence. Undaunted, we tried again, this time asking tutors of literature classes to distribute and return the forms to us. This time seventy-nine forms were returned from four classes.

40% of the literature students had been attending classes for several years and valued the opportunity they provided for discussion with people who shared literary interests. This suggests a settled group, clear about what they like and their reasons for doing so. This was reinforced by their overwhelmingly negative reaction to any suggestion that studying literature might lead to an interest in writing or that writing could enhance the understanding of literature. Not only was literature perceived as separate from creative writing, they wanted it kept that way.

The findings indicate the sort of ideas that circulate in society about writing and writers and are similar to those expressed during the library survey by people who were shocked by the suggestion that writing might be done both voluntarily and for pleasure : 'I've done enough writing for one lifetime'. When asked if literature classes would be enhanced by practical sessions on writing, almost three quarters of the sample of literature students replied no. Unequivocally : 'The two things should not be mixed up', 'Not in the least', 'Why should it?'.

Of those who thought the sessions would be enhanced, equal numbers supported their opinion by saying it would help with general essay writing as said it would increase their understanding of writers and writing. The literature students were asked whether an interest in literature encouraged or discouraged an interest in writing. Well over half felt

Grove Hill Womens' Writing Group

I stopped writing for thirty-five years. My husband came in one day and said: 'I won't have you wasting your time writing poetry' and I thought, 'Well, you can't live with somebody and persist in doing something they disapprove of.'

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I'd been running this woman and toddler group which was all women, and nobody felt there was anything unusual about that, but the minute I joined a women's writing group everybody thought that was a bit strange, a bit of a threat to them really.

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that it had no bearing at all and two thirds of these made additional comments to the effect that they disagreed with the suggestion that it might. As students completed the forms their writing got larger and larger, exclamation marks appeared at the end of every sentence. These students, like the library users, saw writing as a talent and a mystery. It isn't something which can be learnt or encouraged, you either have a gift or you don't :

> I believe the urge to write comes irrationally from within. Not quite a visit from the Muse but something exceedingly difficult to 'learn' in a classroom situation.
>
> I am under no illusions about my potential ability as a writer.

With this view in command, the only role available to the student is one of awed respect and appreciation. Writing is not seen as a process, in which development and change are possible, nor as a social construct, with multiple purposes, some of which are available to all.

There was also evidence that even where an interest in writing was present, studying literature could have an intimidating effect. The attraction, but ultimate disappointment, of literature for writers was something that Andy Croft had personal experience of:

> It's difficult to know where decisions about writing get taken, but I remember at school I'd got a place to read history at University and suddenly I decided I didn't want to do history because I wanted to be a writer. Not that doing an English degree helped in the slightest. I published about three poems I think ! I never came across any writers' groups or workshops. If I had I probably wouldn't have got involved. It wouldn't have occurred to me that it could have been a collective thing. And that's the problem with Eng. Lit.

The problem is you look at what others have done, not to draw inspiration or ground yourself in craft techniques as musicians, artists or sports players do, but to learn 'the size of the challenge' and your own shortcomings :

> Other writers make it look so easy. You try, and find it isn't.

Students who felt more could be made of the relationship between writing and studying literature usually had an existing interest in writing, but some simply saw it as :

> A tool which could aid understanding of the process of writing and re-writing - how to 'get in touch' with intuitive levels of imagination that enable good writing.

There is no desire to force change on people but clearly there is scope for linking the practical and interpretative aspects of writing. Ironically, the strongest incentive to do this may come from changes in assessment. Assessment not only looks set to play a bigger part in adult education, but within higher education the trend is towards more flexible and continuous forms of assessment, such as learning journals and portfolios. As this happens, the value of creative writing in increasing confidence in writing comes into its own, as does its potential to provide imaginative and original exercises in critical judgment and interpretation within literary studies.

Finally, just as we were surprised by the reluctance of readers to write, we were bewildered by the lack of interest in reading from many of the writers. This took different forms. Many poets, for instance, declared their lack of interest in all forms of modern poetry. Others were worried that their writing would be influenced if they read other people's work, which prompted one interviewee to remark, a little unkindly:

> You hear it so often - 'I don't read anything in case it affects my style' and you often think to yourself, that could only be for the better.

Others simply lacked the time or interest. There is something very odd about this disinterest in reading. At the most practical level, writers learn about writing from reading as well as by writing. Again, comparisons with other art forms or with sport are helpful. It is difficult to imagine people who practice these activities only being interested when they are personally involved, yet attendance at Writearound events were often poor from members of the groups and courses. Similarly, on research visits I observed only a few groups referring to other writers and a handful of tutors illustrating exercises and techniques with reference to other writers. During the Winter Poetry and Summer School we provided a large selection of books from the Northern Poetry Library, a small step in encouraging more reading from writers.

More Of The Same ?

All the creative writing activity I came into contact with prided itself on being open to people at any level of interest or experience in writing. Indeed, for many participants this variety provided much pleasure and interest :

> I just love the great difference in people's work. It's so intriguing. It's lovely to see the individuality of people.

Tutors, too, often commented on the enjoyment of seeing different approaches taken by students completing homework exercises. Diversity within the groups clearly has a high premium, but diversity between them is a source of anxiety and conflict.

The growth of opportunities for writers has been predominantly more of the same - general, rather than specialist courses. Only as part of Writearound are there workshops and talks on specific aspects of writing, eg writing for radio, poetry and short story workshops. The two poetry writing workshops, **Poetry 20+** and **Phoenix**, had ceased meeting by 1992. A play-writing group that met at the Dovecot Arts Centre was the only specialised creative writing activity I was aware of in the region.

In May 1993 Andy Croft organised a Conference for Cleveland Writers. It was an opportunity to introduce Mark Robinson, Cleveland's first Literature Development Worker, and for writers to discuss with him the kinds of development they envisaged. There was heated discussion about establishing groups and classes to cater for specialist interests, eg short story, poetry and the novel, and to cater for more advanced or experienced writers. This issue had also come up in discussions with tutors and, to a lesser extent, with students and group members.

One difficulty was the way dividing classes on the basis of special interest had become tangled up with dividing them by ability or experience. This is a sensitive and unresolved topic, as my interview with tutor Jane Edwards demonstrated. I had asked if there was anything about the work that worried her :

> I do have doubts about whether you can actually teach everybody who comes to your group to be a 'good' creative writer, unless you have sets or groups. You can't do that to people, segregate them. Serious writers in this one. It's not acceptable. I'm thinking here not about the group I teach, but about the group I go to.

However, a month later, having checked the transcript for accuracy, she comments :

> I've changed my view on the subject of putting people into differentiated groups. I think my reaction was an emotional one - how could we do this

> to people? How would I feel if I was put in a less advanced group? I now feel that having differentiated groups is the logical thing to do, but that it must be handled with sensitivity.

The issue of providing groups for writers at different stages of experience recurs, as evaluations from the 1993 and 1994 Summer Schools confirm :

> The course would have been better in terms of usefulness if there had been different levels catered for, eg, beginner, more experienced, experienced, but not quite *these*!

The challenge to orthodoxy of open access, mixed ability courses can harden into their own orthodoxy, something often reflected in the way fixed meeting patterns - two hour slots weekly, monthly or fortnightly - impose on the kind of writing activities people undertake and, arguably, their rate of progression. The pressure to get round everyone, coupled with restricted access to photocopying facilities, meant that people often read longer work in very short chunks or write to a length dictated by the amount of time available for reading work. I often observed tutors trying to persuade students to write more than the limit set for reading to the group.

This pattern also influenced the way in which feedback and general discussion happened in the groups. Again, the principle of giving everyone the same amount of attention sometimes left discussion stilted or foreshortened. It also meant that groups rarely spent time discussing how they wanted to approach giving and receiving critical feedback in the group. As we shall see, this tended to weaken their command of this vital aspect of the group's role.

Writearound day schools provided most of the limited opportunities to experience the intensity of prolonged engagement with writing. One of the developmental aspects of the research was to encourage experimentation in this area. From 1993 onwards we devised two types of new provision, specialist courses (poetry, short stories, the novel and play writing) and extended courses (the Summer School week and the Winter Weekend).

Take-up varied significantly. The Summer School was an unqualified success. Initially we set a limit of twenty-five, then thirty and finally, after a last minute hunt for extra tutors, launched the event with fifty-five students. There were three guiding principles behind the school. First, to bring in tutors from outside the area, and preferably established writers (partly to give students experience of new approaches and attitudes towards writing, but also an opportunity for tutors to set aside their responsibility for other people's writing and devote some time to their own). Secondly, to respond to requests for more detailed feedback. Existing tutors worried about this and some struggled to fit one-to-one sessions into their classes or took home piles of work to read and comment on. The School offered individual tutorials on the basis of work sent in advance. Finally, we wanted to explore the writing process and writing habits with students rather than concentrate on techniques or triggers alone. In doing this, we aimed to build independence in writing through increasing the challenge. As one tutor commented, 'two hours just isn't long enough to push people and to watch to make sure they don't fall over'.

Twenty-seven of the fifty-five students on the 1993 Summer School agreed to be contacted in December to evaluate long term impact had been. Seventeen got back in touch. Almost half had ended the week feeling they had more to learn about writing, but on the whole they felt enthused and excited by this rather than undermined. Their intentions had either been very specific - find a writing group, send work off to publishers, finish my novel etc - or a general aim to take writing more seriously and devote more time to it. Twelve of them felt they were making progress towards their goal, it was marginally easier for those with specific goals to identify a sense of progress. Of those not making progress with their goals, three were coping with major

changes on the home or work front while the other two, although they had enjoyed the week greatly, were no longer writing :

> I was woolly when I started the week and even woollier when I finished it. I am totally blocked about writing. I would just rather not think about the whole idea.

Ten of those replying said they felt more positive now about their writing than they had done before the Summer School, four felt more negative and three felt about the same. The experience justified our hunch that students would enjoy and benefit from a more challenging and intensive writing experience, as Doris Donaldson confirmed :

> I'm finding writing more and more difficult, but exciting - I am constantly re-writing as I'm no longer easily pleased with the end result.

However, there could be costs, as John Robinson discovered :

> The Summer School became a transition period for me and I returned to my group with new ideas. Maybe this wasn't a good thing as I found myself wanting to 'move on' and I became increasingly intolerant of the class until finally I gave up attending. I can't find any momentum to write at the moment although I'm sure I will continue to write eventually.

The specialist courses are taking longer to establish. Although it has been requested several times, we are struggling to get a poetry group off the ground. Short story writing has been the most successful, possibly because its based on an existing group which decided it wanted to specialise.

We experimented with a novel writing group, putting it on monthly rather than weekly. Circulating and reading out work has been complicated to manage, but on the whole groups members found the discipline of the meetings and encouragement of other writers and the tutor positive. The introduction of accreditation offers students the possibility of studying for a certificate in creative writing and perhaps, in the future, a single subject or combined degree. This will mean offering a combination of general courses with options in specific forms or genres. As long as this remains a choice within the full range of courses, I think it is a development to be encouraged.

Creative writing courses are at their best when starting people off, and in working at MA level, but there is very little in between, as tutor Mandy Sutter noted :

> Lots of 'Ways Into' type of provision, but little that's more advanced. Even Arvon offers mainly starter courses. There's very little specialised or differentiated choice. All the courses are just called creative writing.

As other tutors commented, we don't pay a great deal of attention to the 'where next?' aspect of creative writing courses. The assumption that once people join they'll continue indefinitely is fine for some, but may not suit others - or at least not all the time as this summer school student commented :

> I'd got into a rut with my writing group, good friends though they are.

If people continue to do the same thing year after year are they being helped to achieve all they might be capable of ? Is it really the kind of group new people can join and feel comfortable in? There are problems with the idea that people only need a little bit of help to start them off before automatically becoming self-sufficient. One group felt :

> People think that a writers' group only needs so much input and then you're off on your own. We had Trevor for a long time but then the

> money ran out. I think we needed him, not for the 'getting published' advice but for the writing, the expertise and knowledge, the stimulus. You can get too involved when you're inside the group, you need an outsider."

People's needs do change, and courses and groups must change with them, though often the more experienced a writer or a group is, the more complex and subtle are their needs. On many occasions I observed groups or individuals struggling with the tension between pushing on and going back to the beginning. This was most striking during the visits I made to **Cleveland Women Writers' Group** which, because of the way it originated, was sorting out whether and on what basis it would continue to meet. The group had some conflict about its role, and whose interests it aimed to meet :

> Perhaps it should be open to people who have never written a word ?

Although the group, in 1994, mainly attracts experienced or published writers, it is concerned with women excluded from writing. It pressed for a daytime women's' group, which has been running at Grove Hill library since April 1994 with some of its members voluntarily caring for the children of women attending.

This inclusive impulse is important, but there are dangers. Being one or two steps on from starting out is not the same as reaching the end. Those who have ambitions of publication still have a good deal to learn. There is a danger that if perceived as the most experienced members of the group, individual writers become complacent or, as I often observed, fellow group members are genuinely impressed by their achievement and unable to offer the kind of incisive discussion needed to develop their writing. It can also lead to an imbalance - instead of the group supporting its members' development, individual aims are subsumed by the needs of and loyalty towards the group. My feeling is the more diversity - of approach, of challenge, of specialism - the better.

Assessment

> Are you seeking performance indicators for what we do ? Because if you are they're not appropriate. Numbers attending are all that matter. Everything else is too subjective.

I was interested in accreditation. I had to be. The central review of adult continuing education which reported in late 1993 required all University adult education to be accredited. When it became clear that accreditation was inevitable, I wanted to try and ensure that any scheme introduced was appropriate both to creative writing and to the way the groups worked. So I set up a working group, made up of Andy, myself and three creative writing tutors - Bob Beagrie, Jane Edwards and Brian Morton - to explore the issue in depth. I also made contact with adult continuing education departments in other parts of the country to see how accredited creative writing courses worked.

Experience elsewhere confirmed that when adult education students were offered the choice of assessment they tended not to take it. In Sheffield, students could take creative writing options as part of a University Certificate and approximately 20% of them did so. They took the same courses as non-accredited students, but had additional work to do which was handed in and marked. Freda Scriven, the course director, felt it worked: 'I don't think anyone's nose has been put out of joint, there's been no friction'.

Graham Harthill was researching assessment in adult education creative writing for Edinburgh University. He argued that because so much of the work was group based, and the group dynamic produced progress, any evaluation should be group, rather than individually, based. Although I agree with much of what Graham says, my view is that the value of the group to its individual members is precisely the reason why it should be

left outside the assessment framework. I also believe that however valuable and important the group is, its value should be realised in individual, as well as group, terms.

The assessment group set about its task of devising and piloting ways to assess creative writing rather glumly. Those of us, like myself and Bob, who felt assessment might be both possible and desirable weren't happy about the element of compulsion. Brian and Jane had fairly open minds and Andy knew that however nicely we dressed it up, assessing writing would always be a terrible idea.

However, assessment was vital if we were to achieve our aim of taking creative writing beyond community education. However much I disagree with the idea that the worth of an educational activity rests in whether it can be assessed, this is largely why creative writing isn't considered a 'proper subject'. Until somebody settles the question, creative writing won't be taken seriously in educational circles.

But I had other reasons to make an issue of assessment. Almost everyone I talked with during the research recognised critical feedback as the most valuable aspect of the groups and courses. And almost everyone was dissatisfied with the way critical feedback was given in their groups. Assessment, by putting feedback under the spotlight, could make a contribution here. I took this approach because some years previously I had been forced to accredit return to learning courses I taught in Hackney. To my chagrin, examining how we ran the courses and monitored students' progress revealed much room for improvement and some quite shameful practices. Accreditation produced better courses and tutors and, because we adopted flexible forms of continuous assessment, were not the unbearable pressure on students we feared they would be.

The group set out to devise a form of assessment in keeping with the overall aims of the courses. Students were encouraged to set their own goals and monitor their own progress towards them. We met regularly to discuss progress, and the impact on tutors as well as students. Surprisingly, we found more benefits than we had dared to hope for. Bob valued the assessment scheme because it had pushed him to experiment :

> I knew they had to be more critical and analytical to do the assessment and I had to find ways of supporting them in that. I introduced more concerted and varied learning materials. It kept me on my toes, there was less coasting than there sometimes is.

Jane and I found assessment provided a focus and structure for their sessions, which we as much as students appreciated. Bob and Brian reported that assessment enabled them to identify particular areas of strength and weakness and to target work more effectively within the group. We all benefited from the chance to discuss working methods together.

When the pilot ended we sent a postal questionnaire to a sample of students: one strongly for assessment, one strongly against and one neutral from each group. We asked them to consider whether the experience of assessment changed their initial reaction. These had shown a fifty:fifty split, positive and negative, although the latter were more forceful :

> People will be sucked back into subservient notions and lose creative energy. It will be siphoned off into arbitrary attempts to satisfy criteria drawn up by 'those who know better'.

However, negative expectations changed to a positive judgment of assessment in almost half the cases. 21% of negative expectations were confirmed, but no positive expectation changed to negative. The following benefits were associated with the assessment : 'gaining insight into strengths and weaknesses as a writer' (72%), 'having to think about what I was getting out of the class' (52%), 'getting more feedback from the tutor' (64%).

Objections to assessment included anxieties about its negative effects on the processes of

teaching and learning within the group and a resistance to incorporation by the University, especially as participants felt things worked well as they were. This came through most strongly in discussion, and in a letter I received from Trudy Hindmarsh. The choice of medium is an interesting one. Forms and questionnaire smack of the measuring mentality objected to, whereas the letter offers equal dialogue :

> I am of the opinion that nothing of value was ever encapsulated into a tick list. ... Creative work has no right and wrong answers and does not develop weekly in a neat linear way. We are not here to accumulate credits for a degree course that would take us half a lifetime to complete. What most of us are doing is coming to terms with half a lifetime of experience, expressing that in writing and sharing it with others.

At the outset of the assessment pilot, it was unclear whether it was possible to assess creative writing at all. Our experience shows it is possible to assess creative writing, and to do so in ways which do not destroy - as had been feared - highly valued elements of the groups and courses. Not only did the assessment allow these positive outcomes to continue in the classes, but our approach, to make explicit what was implicit in the activity, actually strengthened them. But, just because you can do something isn't an argument to do it. Although I think there is an argument for assessment, I do feel strongly that it is undermined by compulsory and total assessment.

The pilot group concluded that assessment could make a positive contribution to creative writing, although it should be remembered that tutors are tested by schemes just as much as students and, unless carefully supported, may adopt a more formal teaching style believing it to be required of them. Assessment also means additional work loads and acquiring a new set of skills for tutors who are also personally vulnerable. It is not only their students, but their teaching which is open to scrutiny. The positive contribution comes from focussing students on their own progression, achievement and value, thus countering the passivity and lack of direction sometimes found. It develops writing skills, such as reflection, selection and critical judgment. It provides structured one-to-one access to the tutor across the whole class. Its positive outcomes were linked to the intention of becoming better within your own range, not better against an objective or external standard and, as far as possible,this should be retained. Students often look to the market - competitions, publication, financial success - as a way of demonstrating progress. This is fraught with difficulties for both tutor and student. The elusiveness of commercial success can diminish the considerable achievement made by students. It can also pressurise tutors into a more didactic teaching style than many are comfortable with.

The assessment scheme offers a genuine advance on this situation, by developing a new context for a progressive, interactive relationship between the student, their learning, their writing and the tutor. It shifts the emphasis away from producing finished work, which students often did weekly and sometimes repetitively, to experimenting with writing techniques and expanding their knowledge of the writing process. Completing work will remain an important part of the courses but alongside a wider concern with writing and writerly issues, which will make it easier to distinguish a writing course from a writing group. Such a distinction, of course, may not be welcome as many people feel the power of Cleveland's writing activity rests precisely in smudging that line.

Creative Writing Groups

A major strand of enquiry for the research was the relationship between free-standing writers' groups and those supported by the University of Leeds. In order to explore this I had to spend time with the groups themselves. Letters were sent to the free-standing groups asking if I could visit them. In some cases groups were undergoing testing times internally, as was the case with **Poetry 20+, Middlesbrough Writers' Group, Redcar Writers** and **Hartlepool People's Centre,** and visits did not take place. Other groups, **Loftus Writers** and **Housecall**, did not respond to the invitation and in the case of **Cleveland Playwrights** and **Saltburn Writers** problems with my timetable meant planned visits did not take place. In the end, I visited six of Cleveland's independent writers' groups and discussed their work with them. They included one of the longest established, **Brotton Writers**, (formed 1972) and one of the most recent, **Cleveland Women Writers**, later **The Purple Onions** (1992) plus **Yarm** (1988), **Guisborough Writers** (1989), **West View Writers Circle** (1990) and **Foggy Furze Writers** (1991).

Membership of the groups ranges from eight to twenty and at the time of my visits, the smallest group I talked with had five members and the largest fifteen. In all I talked to fifty-seven people. A further group, the **North East Disabled Writers**, invited me to attend their meetings and talk informally with members but was unable to make space for group discussions. Upwards of twenty people attend the meetings, and the network is in touch with even more. I spoke to five men and women about their membership of the group and its impact upon their writing. I had two main purposes. Firstly, to gain a greater understanding, in group members' own terms, of the purpose served by the groups and the strengths and weaknesses of the way they worked. I was interested in :

- who joins groups and why
- what kind of formal structure is adopted
- what purpose groups served
- what distinguishes groups from classes
- how members value their groups

Secondly, I wanted to compare the experience of these groups with that of the writing groups which had been set up through adult education or arts based writing development work. In this context I was interested to know:

- what sort of pressure groups were under
- how they interacted with other creative writing provision
- whether all groups had similar aims and objectives
- how successfully groups met their aims and objectives
- whether groups had developmental or training needs
- how and why people moved from courses to groups

Approaches to the tutored groups were made through their tutors. Tutors who were reluctant to get involved with the research project were also unwilling to involve their groups as well. A number of groups are run in association with other organisations, such as Redcar Mind, Lansdowne Road Day Centre (for those with physical disabilities), Tithebarn House (for the elderly), the Alzheimers Centre and Holme House Prison. These groups often require even more sensitive approaches than the community-based group and can be less flexible as far as the timing of visits is concerned. Consequently there were only two groups which it was both feasible and appropriate to visit. Figures for group membership and attendance vary between ten and forty-five, and I spoke with approximately 148 people. I also visited **Vane Women**, a women's writing group based at Darlington, as this was a form of provision not then available in Cleveland. I visited and talked to five tutored evening groups and five tutored daytime groups between December 1992 and June 1993.

As with the free-standing groups, I was interested in comparisons between this and other

forms of creative writing activity as well as the way participants perceived and valued the courses. I had slightly different questions to ask, designed to explore :

- the factors influencing the decision to join a writing class
- initial expectations, and whether they were met
- the way students perceived the role of the tutor
- how important it was to students to make progress
- how students measured progress
- areas of dissatisfaction in the group
- how students value the activity

Because of the educational context of the research, there were certain aspects that I was interested in as a tutor as much as a researcher. To put it baldly: tutors teach and students learn - but does the learning happen because or in spite of the teaching ? Do students learn what the tutor intended them to learn or do they learn something else? These questions had a particular inflection in Cleveland where everyone - organisers, tutors, students - played down their connection to education :

> They don't think of it as a ten week course, they see it as a social event that will go on for ever. They're not in it for the education.
>
> I don't think of myself as a tutor.
>
> I feel very mixed about this idea of training to teach creative writing. You just feel it, do it.
>
> I don't like the idea of it being a course. I want to come amongst people doing the same as me and get a response.

This contradiction is a source of interlinked strengths and weaknesses. Strength lies in the contribution it makes to a genuinely democratic and equal exchange between group members. But it extends beyond the group itself, giving those who want it a stake in the creating something with far-reaching and sustained impact on their local cultural life.

Support and guidance for free standing groups

Setting up a successful writing group can involve chance as much as judgment. Many of the groups had formed from taught courses and most had members with some experience of tutored groups. This meant they had practical examples of how to organise themselves to draw on. The groups followed very different patterns: some set homework, others relied on their members' independent writing, others concentrated on publication. The groups also varied in the extent to which they socialised together - during or outside group meetings - and in the depth and severity of their discussions of each other's work.

Although the free-standing groups were often indistinguishable from the community-based writing courses, there were important distinctions. The groups do not have the cycle of termly meetings with its regular intake of new members and this can cause difficulties, for example low attendance or predictability and lack of stimulus :

> We all know what style to expect. The friendship here helps, I'm very comfortable with it, but we know what to expect.

All but **Brotton Writers** expressed the need for additional outside input :

> I'd like to be able to go to totally unbiased groups of people and get feedback. Someone consistent to take our work in and give us criticism.

Feedback and criticism was an issue for virtually every group, tutored or not, that I visited but it has a greater impact on the free-standing groups, where reading out and commenting on the work occupies a much greater proportion of their activities.

Some groups had a formal structure of organisation - chair, treasurer and so on, or an informal leader. This meant responsibility for the overall direction of the group, in terms of the writing and the personalities, fell on a few people. Responsibilities were mostly carried out with great conscientiousness, but not always :

> I expected a fairly informal idea of what was expected of us and what we got was two old men bickering, the rest of us never got a look in.

As with the tutors, people responsible for running groups needed to be careful about their own needs as writers. Although most of the groups were happy most of the time with what went on, there was some dissatisfaction expressed. It was unclear how they were resolved other than putting up with them or leaving the group :

> We help each other a lot, but it's the blind leading the blind.

Giving and receiving constructive criticism

Feedback and criticism came up unprompted in every discussion. Tutors resented students for expecting them alone to judge work and for narrowing feedback to issues of whether and where a piece might be published. Tutors felt anxious: who were they to say if work was good or not, how could they tell if someone really wanted their honest opinion ? They, like the students and group members, felt under pressure to be positive all the time, but tacitly understood that being nice could mean not being truthful :

> In the end you can only rely on others, but you don't know if they're just being polite to you.

Students resented their tutors for evading their responsibility to give criticism by trying to foist it onto the group as a whole. A member of one group had been concerned when he'd gone to a class where the tutor 'wasn't instructing anyone. It was left to the students to comment, you were expected to know all about writing.' Group members worried whether they had the skills and knowledge to give useful, authoritative criticism.

A contradiction began to emerge. People went to writing groups to get feedback on their work, it was the aspect they valued above all else and it was also the one area in which they wanted to see change. The issue was partly whose responsibility criticism was seen to be: the writer, the group or its leader/tutor. But it also reflected confusion about the timing of criticism and its appropriateness. At the heart of the problem was a feeling that, as a member of **Thornaby** group put it, you got encouragement *or* criticism :

> I've no idea from the two groups I've been in whether I'm making progress or not. There's very little technical oversight. I think the creative writing group as a nice positive leisure group militates against the kind of criticism I want.

In discussion, the group was divided about whether or not penetrating criticism could come from within the group. A fair number felt they wanted 'encouragement and some guidance, not criticism. It's not appropriate to this setting.' Whereas others felt giving intensive criticism was the tutor's role, 'tutors should do it, or create the means or the atmosphere to do it.' The consensus was that the kind of criticism people wanted depended on why they wrote. A distinction was made between therapeutic and literary interests, between writing as a leisure activity and those seeking publication :

> I look on this as recreational. I don't expect it to be strong on marking, it's a way of passing time and it fills a need that isn't professional. I could play tennis, except I'm not a sporty person.

Across all the groups there was enormous variety in the type of feedback people gave and considered relevant or useful. Less easy to talk about, but clearly at issue, was people's confidence and ability not just to give criticism, but to receive it. Many people recognised constructive criticism was important, but found it hard to do in practice, whether they had a leadership or a learning role.

One of the main reasons this happens is that people have a cobbled together model of criticism drawn from school - criticism as negative, unpleasant and fault finding - and from the market - criticism as a selective judgment. Few models came from the writing process itself - criticism as a means to extend, clarify and challenge the writer - or responding to the work. Because the model was unclear - and likely to remain so while groups prioritised 'the writing' over discussions about how to respond to that writing - tutors, students and group members were bound to find this a difficult area.

Rather than attempt to tell people this, I put giving and receiving constructive criticism at the hub of the participative research. I hoped in this way to produce really useful insights and guidelines which could gradually be incorporated into the way groups worked.

Changing ways and words

People explained the problem to themselves in various ways. Some felt it had its roots in a lack of knowledge about technical skills, writing markets or literary issues. For others, it arose because the group/course fostered a closeness that made it hard to view the work objectively. Others were sensitive to the difficulty of saying things face to face. Groups said they felt inhibited knowing the people whose work they heard, and tutors reported there were no problems responding to work brought into the group, only work from inside. I decided to set up an anonymous writing exchange to check this out.

I approached **Foggy Furze Writers** and **Guisborough Writers**, groups roughly matched in interests and experience. They agreed to exchange work, and decided amongst themselves how to comment on it: eg everyone to make a brief note on each, one person to appraise in depth, imagine they were editors etc. Having swapped their anonymous comments on anonymous work, they met to review the experience.

Those taking part found it useful, although there were times everyone found difficult. The main problem was that each group interpreted their task very differently. This was precisely what I wanted the groups to discover. They drew up guidelines for others wanting to exchange work. These include: the person asking for criticism to state what kind of feedback they would find useful, groups to agree ground rules about length and method of commenting, eg whole group or one-to-one, in advance. The writing exchange was a courageous start to tackling the feedback issue. Its success encouraged me to organise a full day event on giving and getting good feedback.

In December 1993 over fifty people, from Cleveland, West Yorkshire and County Durham, exchanged experiences of giving and receiving criticism. I used various techniques to develop focused discussion: small group work, guided questions, a worksheet on the words people use about critical feedback, a video improvisation of better and worse responses to classic workshop situations made with the help of the **Harrow Road Wednesday** group, and a chance to debrief after a workshop session. Four facilitators guided participants into, and recorded their responses to, the day's various activities.

An indication of the need for greater awareness came in the activity based on the language of criticism. I scanned the notes and transcripts of all my visits to record how people described giving and getting criticism. It was a list of violent and aggressive language: tear it to pieces, pull it apart and so on. I gave these out with the question: what strikes you about this language ? Although I was accused of being selective, the constructive phrases simply weren't there. As one of the facilitators commented :

> Although people deplored the gladitorial bent of The Words People Use, they seemed, still, to see it in those terms. One lady admitted, 'I want tough criticism, but I know I can't take it'.

Critical response, along with encouraging writing, is at the heart of creative writing's teaching and learning. Ways of stimulating and encouraging writing are relatively well established and in circulation through text books, shared experience and discussion. They are also easy to evaluate by students and tutors. Critical response is less developed and there is clearly a need for more developmental work. These guidelines, compiled from various participative events during the research offer a starting point.

Guidelines for good feedback

Points for everyone to remember

1. The silence after you finish reading will seem longer to you than to anyone else. It doesn't mean they hated your piece, it means they're absorbing it and gathering their thoughts.

2. Discuss the kind of group you want yours to be: generating writing, exploring techniques, aiming for publication? This will help you sort out what kind of feedback you need.

3. Draw up ground rules for giving and receiving feedback. They may vary from person to person - *Have I got my point across ?* is different from *Is anyone going to publish this ?* Review how they're working: new members join and needs change.

4. Comments on other people's work apply to your own too, and are easier to take in.

5. Nobody - including tutors and group leaders - should be allowed to comment on work if they aren't prepared to bring their own.

6. If you're always 'kind' about people's work, can you trust their 'kindness' ?

7. Allocating time fairly is important, but more time less often might sometimes be more useful, especially to prose or play writers.

8. Balance discussions of subject matter and its presentation - form and content.

9. Not everyone who says they want to give and take critical feedback really does.

10. There's more to it than 'pointing out the flaws'.

Points to bear in mind if you're giving feedback

1. A comment - praise, puzzle or panning - without a reason is no good to the writer, because they don't know what they did to cause that response in you.

2. Ask the writer questions rather than offering judgments. Some examples: Did it change as you wrote it ? Do you think it's finished ? Why does this line end here ?

3. You don't have to like everything - but you must be able to say why and respect differences. Always striving for the middle way can lead to bland or cosy groups.

4. Experiment: work in smaller groups, take work away and read it, bring extra copies.

5. Keep the focus on the writer and their writing.

6. Comment from strengths and positives. It's easier to hear what didn't work if you know something did.

7. Watch out if there are only two or three people whose opinions count. Is this fair to them - or the rest of you ?

Bob Beagrie at work

A special note for tutors

Although many of you want to be 'no different from the rest', you are. As tutor you bear certain responsibilities which include :

1. Taking care of the group - allocate time fairly, referee conflict (not the same as squashing it), soothe hurt feelings, judge who is and isn't up to rigorous criticism.

2. Show, don't tell ... We need to learn how to become confident and skilled in giving and getting good feedback. Share your knowledge of it with us, as well as your knowledge about writing and publishing, please.

Points to bear in mind if you're on the receiving end

1. It's the work, not you, that's under scrutiny. And it's **this** version of **this** piece, not everything you ever have or might write.

2. Indicate what sort of feedback you want. This is not the same as apologising. Do you consider the work finished ? Feel unsure about a different style ? and so on.

3. Act on the feedback. Write notes as people talk. Finish pieces, re-write them, send them off. If you aren't prepared to do this, why should others put in all that effort ?

4. Read work of an appropriate length.

A special note for us all

I can think of no better way to end this section than with Karen Rafftery's comment during the **Giving and Getting Good Feedback Day** :

> Criticism has got itself a bad name. Unfairly so, was the unanimous belief of my group. It can and should be a positive experience. As writers and readers we are eminently qualified to give considered evaluation to one another's work.

Katrina Porteous' Writing Workshop

Creative Writing Tutors

> I assumed it was compulsory but I would still have said yes because I want feedback. It's very isolated working as a tutor and I was curious about what everyone else had to say.

Creative writing tutors working for the University of Leeds meet once a term to sort out practical matters, share information about the term's work and discuss general issues. I attended these meetings regularly. As the research progressed various issues specific to tutors emerged which I introduced into this meeting as well as giving general reports. The topics we covered in this way were: tutors as writers, assessment and feedback. I also interviewed fourteen tutors: ten women and four men. Three tutors, all men, declined involvement with the research. Most were Cleveland based, but I included three women from outside the region who taught women-only classes, not then available in Cleveland. I was interested in finding out :

- how and why people became tutors
- their views on training for creative writing tutors
- the kind of approach and activities they took to their work
- the effects of tutoring on their own writing
- doubts or anxieties about their work

Writers as tutors

Most tutors perceived their role to be less teaching, in the accepted sense of the word, and more to do with facilitating or co-ordinating. Many stressed that they learnt as much from the classes as their students did and those who also taught other subjects spoke warmly about the greater pleasures of teaching creative writing. In visiting and talking with the groups I found no evidence of any major shortcomings, but facilitation takes as much - if not more - skill and effort as teaching, and I think tutors sometimes deny their own skills and stresses by seeing their work as 'only' facilitating.

The regular meetings organised for tutors by the University of Leeds provide opportunities for tutors to learn from each other by swapping experiences and ideas. And, importantly, the more experienced tutors act as mentors to newer recruits: offering suggestions about how to approach and organise the sessions, recommending useful books to read and acting as sympathetic listeners if things go wrong. But despite this, some tutors still felt isolated or unsure about their work. Many tutors wanted a central resource bank including hints and guidelines. We hope to establish this in the near future.

One area highlighted by the research was the need to provide continued stimulus and support to the more experienced tutor. This doesn't imply their work is at fault, just that after several years tutoring different issues arise. Equally, however good a tutor is, she or he will always benefit from opportunities to experiment and diversify.

Tutors as writers

In Cleveland, as elsewhere, creative writing tutors tend to be writers who have themselves been members of writing groups. Recently, the increasing number of creative writing courses and groups has led to debate about the consequence of this for tutors. There are two misgivings. Firstly, that becoming a writer is now less likely to be defined by success in writing and publishing than by teaching creative writing courses. Secondly, that teaching writing can damage the tutor's own writing. Linda Anderson, writing in The *Times Higher Education Supplement* in August 1992, said :

> Teaching creative writing draws on energies too similar to those required for writing itself. A deceptive gratification. Writing by proxy ! So, should

> writers teach ? Writers should write. Teaching will be a necessity or a temptation to many of us. Be careful not to use it as a flight from the demands of your own talent. Nor to lull yourself with the public image of a writer without filling the pages.

Few of Cleveland's writing tutors have been widely published, although most have a long standing interest in writing. This brings them closer to the concerns and interests of group members but also, for precisely this reason, makes them vulnerable to the dangers of putting other people's writing before their own. Tutors confirmed my sense that this can be an area of difficulty. Heather Bennett, for example, interrupted herself to say :

> It's suddenly just dawned on me that I found it frightening and off-putting how quickly I went from beginner to expert.

She had benefited from teaching too :

> Initially there was a great surge, because writing had been so solitary. There was a pooling of experience and sharing of enthusiasm that boosts your own creativity.

Heather, like others, found she could benefit as much as her students from the opening up of ideas and excitement that a writing group generates. But there comes a time, very hard to pinpoint, when tutoring works against writing. This took different forms but was often a pressure on time. I'm sure Terry Lawson speaks for many :

> As a writer you need time for yourself. It's advice I give the students, be selfish, be possessive of that hour of your own time and writing. And I consistently break it myself.

Time was especially pressurised for those developing writing opportunities for others :

> It wasn't just the tutoring. I was starting writing groups, going to Writearound meetings, staying up all night doing layouts for *Outlet* and tutoring about four courses all over Cleveland. I did do some writing, but a lot of my creativity was going into all the rest.

One of the great strengths of Cleveland's writing culture is its passionate refusal of elitism: writing for one is writing for all. But sadly, that commitment is often paid for by the unfulfilled writing aspirations of its activists. Many of the tutors I spoke to felt uneasy about bringing their own writing into the classroom and some felt prevented from attending writing events. As one tutor, speaking of another, put it :

> Any time he came to the group he was expected to be a tutor. It was hard for him to read his own work out, it's very different to his tutor persona.

However much tutors want to give back the power of the teaching situation to the group as a whole they still occupy positions of authority: the giver of confidence and holder of other people's vulnerabilities. This makes it difficult for others to perceive them as writers too with insecurities and things to learn. The difficulties are increased by the sense of opposition there seemed to be between enabling others and enabling yourself. Tutors were careful not to be seen to take advantage of the group's time for their own needs, or to impose their views too strongly. It was, for example, rare for tutors to do the writing exercises alongside the group or refer to their own habits and values in writing. This separates the writer from the tutor, for the group and for the tutor, and in my opinion this separation is harmful. The group is denied access to the practical, working processes of their tutor as a writer and the tutor may find it harder and harder to re-connect their writing and tutoring selves.

Some tutors found this transition difficult during the Tutors as Writers sessions I ran at their termly meeting, an indication of how sensitive the relationship is between writing and tutoring writing. Where tutors adopted a more integrated approach, in effect **teaching as writers**, the relationship was perceived more positively :

> I've done a lot of encouraging and nurturing and felt that back. I think about writing an awful lot, the one informs the other. It increased the intensity of being and feeling involved with writing very much more completely than if it had remained a hidden, private thing.

North Ormesby Primary School book week

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Wrapping it Up

> Words are never true enough. By trying to reach out and be true to the world, you also discover yourself - your relation to the world.

It may have sometimes felt like an inquisition, but I hope by now it is clear that the research project had nothing and nobody on trial and there won't be a final summing up to decide the fate of Cleveland writing. It remains where it always has been, with those who make their contribution to it as writers, readers, tutors, organisers or publishers. However, if a case for the defence is ever needed, then the findings of this research project will make a strong one. Creative writing activity in Cleveland is strong, powerful and exciting. An enormous amount of energy is put into, and generated by, a genuinely popular writing movement at individual, group and community level. Cleveland may not have the London literati knocking at its door, but there is no denying the achievement of a network of activities and personal contacts which make writing simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary. As one student said :

> **Not only is writing an alright thing to do, but it's what you're expected to do, which is important to me in the face of so many other things crying out to be done.**

And once the foundation of writing's possibility is laid, it becomes possible to push the writing on, as is happening now to some Cleveland writers, until it breaks through to national significance.

Research projects are obliged to make recommendations - although nobody is obliged to take any notice of them and, in keeping with the dual focus of this research, there are two sets. One, which will be included in a formal report suggests extending the type and range of creative writing courses run by the University of Leeds. It also suggests seeking further funding to continue the developmental work and establish a resource base and regional forum to exchange information about teaching creative writing. The second set of recommendations, which are directed towards activists and participants, are really suggestions for reflection and discussion. Whether these lead anywhere we shall have to see, but at a local level the research project's catalysing effects will continue to work in groups and individuals, as will the institutional changes - not all of which are as bad as accreditation.

These are my concerns. Firstly, if creative writing resolutely refuses to belong to education, it risks having its claims on educational agencies for resources rejected. There is a difference between recognising that people's previous experience of education may have left a negative legacy and saying creative writing does not belong in the classroom in any shape or form. The latter will always be a source of controversy, the former poses more of a problem. I believe an opportunity to change people's perception of the nature of contemporary education, and its relevance and value to them, is being lost. The education against which tutors and students define their activities is often a paper tiger. The definition of the tutor's role as enabler or facilitator, an emphasis on group work and valuing education in terms of its social and transformative purpose are not new ideas in adult education. They have informed work in women's studies, adult literacy and return to learning for many years and are now filtering into mainstream subject teaching.

A great deal of knowledge has been generated about working in this way and creative writing tutors are cut off from the potential it has to boost their confidence and performance. It became clear visiting the groups that whether they wanted to or not, tutors did carry enormous responsibilities for making the groups work. Tutors would benefit both from exploring previous work in adult education in this area and from beginning to collect, examine and share their own best ways of working. Groups and tutors need to recognise that what they value about the groups needn't be in opposition to education, and is to a great extent inherent in contemporary adult education. This would

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mean we were all better placed to defend and lobby for adult education. The issue is not in or out of education, but an argument within education about its nature and purpose.

Secondly, I felt many issues about value were left harmfully unexplored. Challenging writing and writers is part of the developmental process which results in writers who have something to say and the means to say it as well as possible. And this, to me, is the point of writing: gaining effective access to a communicative and expressive medium of great power. During the research I observed and discussed with people a great deal of confusion about the value of writing. What has become clearer to me over the years is that writing has no absolute value, as process or product. But it does have values. Because writing has for so long been controlled by a limited set of values - against which most of us would be judged and found severely wanting - we are reluctant to admit that we are engaged in a constant process of selection, ordering and judging - about writing just as much as other aspects of our lives. We like and dislike things and we do our own and each other's writing no favours by trying to suspend those judgments. I think we want to do this because of the confusion that arises when the values of communication and expression aren't clearly distinguished. There are arguments within, as well as about, writing. As a member of **Harrow Road's Wednesday Group** said :

> Expressing yourself isn't abstractly good. If you throw a brick you're expressing yourself.

Writing which may, for all sorts of reasons, be good to write, is not necessarily good to read. I have no quarrel with work that is simply good to write and I would argue strongly that such writing is entitled to support and resources, but not on the basis that it always produced writing which was good to read. Writing has different purposes and different values, and we strengthen our case by being clear about this. When access to the process is restricted, much good writing and many good writers are lost to the culture. But this is not to say that all excluded writers would be great writers, nor that an automatic correlation exists between the value of a piece to its author and its value to a reader.

This disengagement from the question of value is, I believe, partly responsible for the third area of concern I have, to do with the way innovation hardens into orthodoxy. There was very little experimentation - in writing styles, in ways of running writing groups, in the approach to organising a programme of classes - and very little debate about this or values and standards. People are aware of standards and values "out there" but rarely debate - and therefore develop - their own. They either try to match the demands of commercial publication or turn their back on modern writing. Ironically, for the radical undertaking which Cleveland's approach to writing is, this results in a somewhat conservative and conventional body of writing. Perhaps this links with the question of isolation. The support and validation from other writers was highly valued :

> At home you just get glazed eyes, but here people talk back.

If you find a group you can share *something* with, perhaps you don't risk losing it by forcing any issues. Nevertheless, I was surprised by how few arguments about writing took place in Cleveland. I don't think people were on their best behaviour just because I was there, rather the comments I heard on several occasions about leaving politics and religion at the door have become conventional. The impulse to placate and diffuse conflict was ever present and I found myself longing for the combative approaches to writing I grew up with. Perhaps the first arguments will start here, about the things I've said - or not said - in this report. I hope so. I raise these issues - the relationship to education, the need to engage with questions of good and bad writing and the value of debate - because when something is this good, it is worth striving for the best.

Acknowledgements: Participants in the Research

A project such as this could not have happened at all - and certainly not as successfully as it did - without the goodwill of the many individuals and organisations who created and sustain the creative writing activities I researched. I am extremely grateful to them all for sharing their time, thoughts and troubles with me and sincerely hope they feel the outcomes do them justice. The research was often demanding and stressful for everybody, me included. The generosity with which my enquiries and requests were met indicate the warmth and friendliness which any aspirant writer approaching these groups and courses would meet.

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Bramblethorne Writers
Cleveland Women Writers
Guisborough Thursday
Harrow Road Tuesday Morning
Lansdowne Road
New Opportunities for Women
Ormesby Wednesday
Redcar Wednesday
Vane Women
Write Away
Yarm Thursday
Brotton Writers
Foggy Furze Writers
Guisborough Writers
Harrow Road Wednesday Evening
Loftus Wednesday
North East Disabled Writers' Group
Ormesby Friday
Thornaby Thursday
West View Writers' Circle
Writearound Committee 1992-1994
Yarm Writers

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Photographer	Dermot Blackburn
Advisory Group	Bob Beagrie, Mark Robinson

Pilot Assessment Project

Working Group	Bob Beagrie, Jane Edwards, Brian Morton
Pilot Groups	Harrow Road Tuesday Morning
	Harrow Road Wednesday Night
	North Ormesby Library
	Redcar Library
	Robert Atkinson Centre, Thornaby

Feedback & Criticism Projects

Video	"The Been There, Done That Workshop", Harrow Road Wednesday Night
Workshop Day	Denise Abbott
	Karen Rafftery
	Mark Robinson
Writing Exchange	Guisborough Writers
	Foggy Furze Writers

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Graham Mort
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Doris Perley
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Lesley Taylor
Peter Taylor
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Julie Ward
Sylvia Watson
Fiona Weatherall
Margaret Weir
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Margaret Wilkinson

Some Ideas for Further Reading

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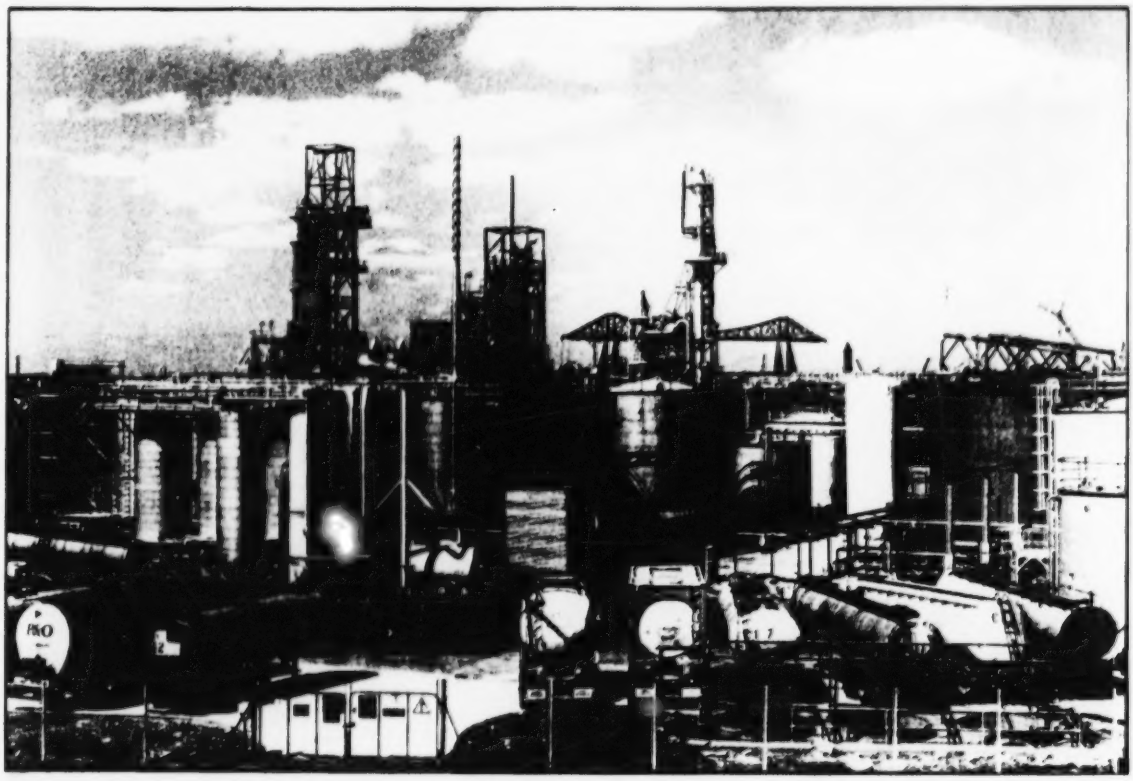

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